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COLLECTED POEMS

VOL. I

BY V. SACKVILLE-WEST

Fiction

THE EDWARDIANS
ALL PASSION SPENT
FAMILY HISTORY
SEDUCERS IN ECUADOR (*out of print*)

Travel

PASSENGER TO TEHERAN
TWELVE DAYS

V. SACKVILLE-WEST



COLLECTED POEMS

VOLUME ONE



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

AN asterisk, both in the table of contents and in the text, indicates those verses hitherto unpublished, or printed only in periodicals or anthologies.

The other verses have been taken from previous volumes, but I have preferred to mix the old and the new together according to subject rather than to chronology. I have appended dates wherever possible.

I am indebted to Messrs. Heinemann for permission to reprint *The Land*; to Messrs. John Lane for permission to reprint thirty-six poems from *Orchard and Vineyard*, and four from *Poems of West and East*; to Messrs. Faber & Faber for permission to reprint *Invitation to cast out Care*, which originally appeared in their series of Ariel poems; to Professor Lascelles Abercrombie for permission to reprint *Reddin*, which originally appeared in his collection of *New English Poems*; to Messrs. Cobden-Sanderson, for permission to reprint *Easter and Pentecost enclose the Spring*, which originally appeared in *The New Forget-me-not*; and to Dorothy Wellesley, editor of the Hogarth Poets Series, for permission to reprint *King's Daughter*.

COLLECTED POEMS

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V. S.-W.

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TO MY MOTHER

THE LAND
(1926)

•

TO
DOROTHY WELLESLEY

•

•

Nec sum animi dubius, verbis ea vincere magnum
quam sit et angustis hunc addere rebus honorem.

Georgics, iii. 289-90

•

WINTER

I SING the cycle of my country's year,
I sing the tillage, and the reaping sing,
Classic monotony, that modes and wars
Leave undisturbed, unbettered, for their best
Was born immediate, of expediency.
The sickle sought no art; the axe, the share
Draped no superfluous beauty round their steel;
The scythe desired no music for her stroke,
Her stroke sufficed in music, as her blade
Laid low the swathes; the scythesmen swept, nor
cared

What crop had ripened, whether oats in Greece
Or oats in Kent; the shepherd on the ridge
Like his Boeotian forebear kept his flocks,
And still their outlines on our tenderer sky
Simple and classic rear their grave design
As once at Thebes, as once in Lombardy.

I sing once more
The mild continuous epic of the soil,
Haysel and harvest, tilth and husbandry;
I tell of marl and dung, and of the means
That break the unkindly spirit of the clay;
I tell the things I know, the things I knew
Before I knew them, immemorially;

COLLECTED POEMS

And as the fieldsman of unhurrying tread
Trudges with steady and unchanging gait,
Being born to clays that in the winter hold,
So my pedestrian measure gravely plods,
Telling a loutish life. I have refused
The easier uses of made poetry,
But no small ploy disdain to chronicle,
And (like that pious yeoman laid to rest
Beneath the legend that told all his life
In five hard words: "He tilled the soil well")
Prune my ambition to the lowly prayer
That I may drive the furrow of my tale
Straight, through the lives and dignities I know.

Why should a poet pray thus? poets scorn
The boundaried love of country, being free
Of winds, and alien lands, and distances,
Vagabonds of the compass, wayfarers,
Pilgrims of thought, the tongues of Pentecost
Their privilege, and in their peddler's pack
The curious treasures of their stock-in-trade,
Bossy and singular, the heritage
Of poetry and science, polished bright,
Thin with the rubbing of too many hands:
Myth, glamour, hazard, fables dim as age,
Faith, doubt, perplexity, grief, hope, despair,
Wings, and great waters, and Promethean fire,
Man's hand to clasp, and Helen's mouth to kiss.
Why then in little meadows hedge about
A poet's pasture? shed a poet's cloak

THE LAND—WINTER

For fustian? cede a birthright, thus to map
So small a corner of so great a world?

The country habit has me by the heart,
For he's bewitched forever who has seen,
Not with his eyes but with his vision, Spring
Flow down the woods and stipple leaves with sun,
As each man knows the life that fits him best,
The shape it makes in his soul, the tune, the tone,
And after ranging on a tentative flight
Stoops like the merlin to the constant lure.
The country habit has me by the heart.
I never hear the sheep-bells in the fold,
Nor see the ungainly heron rise and flap
Over the marsh, nor hear the asprous corn
Clash, as the reapers set the sheaves in shocks
(That like a tented army dream away
The night beneath the moon in silver fields),
Nor watch the stubborn team of horse and man
Graven upon the skyline, nor regain
The sign-posts on the roads towards my home
Bearing familiar names—without a strong
Leaping of recognition; only here
Lies peace after uneasy truancy;
Here meet and marry many harmonies,
—All harmonies being ultimately one,—
Small mirroring majestic; for as earth
Rolls on her journey, so her little fields
Ripen or sleep, and the necessities
Of seasons match the planetary law.

COLLECTED POEMS

So truly stride between the earth and heaven
Sowers of grain: so truly in the spring
Earth's orbit swings both blood and sap to rhythm,
And infinite and humble are at one;
So the brown hedger, through the evening lanes
Homeward returning, sees above the ricks,
Sickle in hand, the sickle in the sky.

Shepherds and stars are quiet with the hills.
There is a bond between the men who go
From youth about the business of the earth,
And the earth they serve, their cradle and their grave;
Stars with the seasons alter; only he
Who wakeful follows the pricked revolving sky,
Turns concordant with the earth while others sleep;
To him the dawn is punctual; to him
The quarters of the year no empty name.
A loutish life, but in the midst of dark
Cut to a gash of beauty, as when the hawk
Bears upwards in its talons the striking snake,
High, and yet higher, till those two hang close,
Sculptural on the blue, together twined,
Exalted, deathly, silent, and alone.

And since to live men labour, only knowing
Life's little lantern between dark and dark,
The fieldsman in his grave humility
Goes about his centennial concerns,
Bread for his race and fodder for his kine,
Mating and breeding, since he only knows

THE LAND—WINTER

The life he sees, how it may best endure,
(But on his Sabbath pacifies his God,
Blindly, though storm may wreck his urgent crops,)
And sees no beauty in his horny life,
With closer wisdom than soft poets use.
But I, like him, who strive
Closely with earth, and know her grudging mind,
Will sing no songs of bounty, for I see
Only the battle between man and earth,
The sweat, the weariness, the care, the balk;
See earth the slave and tyrant, mutinous,
Turning upon her tyrant and her slave,
Yielding reluctantly her fruits, to none
But most peremptory wooers.
Wherever waste eludes man's vigilance,
There spring the weeds and darnels; where he treads
Through woods a tangle nets and trips his steps;
His hands alone force fruitfulness and tilth;
Strange lovers, man and earth! their love and hate
Braided in mutual need; and of their strife
A tired contentment born.

I then, who as a wrestler wrought with earth,
Bending some stubborn acres to my will,
Know that no miracle shall come to pass
Informing man, no whisper from Demeter,—
Miraculous strength, initiated lore.
Nothing but toil shall serve him; in their rote
The seasons shall compel his constancy,
(The fields not always fair, nor prospects kind,)

COLLECTED POEMS

Year ripen year, and timely foresight yield
Its measure in due course. And so I sing
Without illusion, seeing fieldsmen go
Heads lowered against sleet, hands frozen red,
Without complaint, but only patient, patient:
So in December sing I, while they come
Weary and dull and silent, tramping home
Through rainy dark, the cowman taking down
The hurricane lantern from its usual peg,
And going round the cattle in the stalls,
The shifting, munching cattle in the dark
And aromatic stalls beneath the rafters,
Swinging the lantern as he goes his rounds,
Clapping the kine upon their bony rumps
And seeing to their comfort ere he comes
Back to the ruddy kitchen for his food,
—Thus sing in winter, watching by the fire:

*Winter
Song*

*Many have sung the summer's songs,
Many have sung the corn,
Many have sung white blossom too
That stars the naked thorn—
That stars the black and naked thorn
Against the chalky blue.*

*But I, crouched up beside the hearth,
Will sing the red and gray;
Red going-down of sun behind
Clubbed woods of winter's day;
Of winter's short and hodden day
That seals the sober hind:*

THE LAND—WINTER

Winter
Song

*Seals him sagacious through the year
Since winter comes again:
Since harvest's but another toil
And sorrow through the grain
Mounts up, through swaths of ripest grain
The sorrow of the soil.*

*No lightness is there at their heart,
No joy in country folk;
Only a patience slow and grave
Beneath their labour's yoke,—
Beneath the earth's compelling yoke
That only serves its slave,*

*Since countryman forever holds
The winter's memory,
When he, before the planets' fires
Have faded from the sky,
From black, resplendent winter sky
Must go about his byres;*

*And whether to the reaper's whirr
That scythes the falling crops,
He travels round the widening wake
Between the corn and copse,
The stubble wake 'twixt corn and copse
Where gleaners ply the rake,*

*Or whether in his granary loft
He pours the winnowed sacks,*

COLLECTED POEMS

*Winter
Song*

*Or whether in his yard he routs
The vermin from the stacks,
The vermin from the staddled stacks
With staves and stones and shouts,*

*Still, still through all the molten eves
Whether he reaps or hones,
Or counts the guerdon of his sweat,
Still to his inward bones,
His ancient, sage, sardonic bones,
The winter haunts him yet.*

*Winter and toil reward him still
While he his course shall go
According to his proven worth,
Until his faith shall know
The ultimate justice, and the slow
Compassion of the earth.*

*An-
dreds-
weald* Hear first of the country that shall claim my theme,
The Weald of Kent, once forest, and to-day
Meadow and orchard, garden of fruit and hops,
A green, wet country on a bed of clay,
From Edenbridge to Appledore and Lympe
Drained by the Medway and the Rother stream,
With forest oaks still hearty in the copse,
Sylva Anderida to Romans. Here
Stretched Andredsweald, and joined the wood of
Blean,

THE LAND—WINTER

Forest and warren, cropped by herds of deer,
And droves of swine that stirred the oak-trees' mast,

*An-
dreds-
weald*

So wild a tract, so darkly green,
No stranger might forsake the trodden way,
Or venture through the trees towards the dene,
But on his horn must blow a warning blast;
No stranger, under Ina's law, might burn the tree,
And send the flame to sear the leaf;
If so he did, he must pay grudgingly
The fullest fine, for fire's a silent thief;
But if he took an axe to fell the oak,
Even several oaks, as many as might be,
Then must he pay for three, not more than three,
For axe is an informer, not a thief,
And at the felling loud in protest spoke.

This was the Weald, compact of forest laws,
Pannage and Gavelswine, Danger and Corredy;
Unhandseled, separate, dark;
Where herdsman, seeking through the sunless days
For berry and for nut,
Shaggy with skins and hung with scarlet haws,
While hogs between the trees went grunting ways,
Lived a brute's life with brutes, and scored the
bark

To blaze the track that led him to his hut.
This was the Weald, but as man conquers slow
Each province of his fief,—poor simple land
Or ravelled knowledge,—so the tardy herd,

COLLECTED POEMS

*An-
dreds-
weald* Waking to action, by impatience stirred,
 Bethought him he might throw
 Trees round his hovel, clearings make by hand,
 And in the sunlight let his children go.

So grew the dene.
Next came the wooden plough,
Turning the furrows of the first bold field,
A patch of light, a square of paler green,
Cupped in the darkness of the Weald.
Hedges fenced off the boar, the bundling sow
Followed by squealing litter; hedges made
By loppings of the bough,
With teinage rudely thrust between.

Thus the foundations of the farm were laid.

*The
Weald
of Kent* The common saying goes, that on the hill
 A man may lie in bed to work his farm,
 Propping his elbows on his window-sill
 To watch his harvest growing like a charm.
 But the man who works the wet and weeping
 soil
 Down in the Weald, must marl and delve and till
 His three-horse land, fearing nor sweat nor droil.
 For through the winter he must fight the flood,
 The clay, that yellow enemy, that rots
 His land, sucks at his horses' hooves
 So that his waggon plunges in the mud,

THE LAND—WINTER

And horses strain, but waggon never moves;
Delays his plough, and holds his spud
With yeavy spite in trenching garden-plots,
The catchy clay, that does its utmost harm,
And comes into his house, to spoil
Even his dwelling, creeps into his bones
Before their time, and makes them ache,
Leaving its token in his husky tones;
And all through summer he must see the clay
Harden as brick, and bake,
And open cracks to swallow up his arm,
Where neither harrow, hoe, nor rake
Can rasp a tilth, but young and eager shoots
Pierce into blank, and wither at the roots.
Yet with his stupid loyalty he will say,
Being a wealden man of wealden land,
Holding his wealden honour as a pledge,
“In times of drought those farms up on the ridge,
Light soil, half sand,
With the first summer gale blow half away,”
And lifts his eye towards the hill with scorn.

*The
Weald
of Kent*

But only a bold man ploughs the Weald for
corn,
Most are content with fruit or pasture, knowing
Too well both drought and winter's heavy going;
So the lush Weald to-day
Lies green in distance, and the horizon's sweep
Deepens to blue in woods, with pointed spire
Pricking the foreground by the village tiles,

COLLECTED POEMS

The Weald of Kent And the hop-kiln's whitened chimney stares between
Paler and darker green of Kentish miles,
And rarely a patch of corn in metal fire
Burnished by sunset ruffles in the green;
But meadow, shaw, and orchard keep
The glaucous country like a hilly sea
Pure in its monotone. Sad eyes that tire
Of dangerous landscape, sadder minds
That search impossible regions of their quest,
Find clement haven after truancy,
A temperate answer, and a makeshift rest.
This is the thing familiar, known;
The safety that the wanderer finds,
Out of the world, one thing his own.
A pause, a lull in journeying, return
After the querying and astonishment;
Reward that only rovers earn
Who have strayed, departed from the peace,
Whether in soul or body widely flown,
Gone after Arabian Nights, the Golden Fleece,
And come back empty-handed, as they went.

Winter Hear next of winter, when the florid summer,
The bright barbarian scarfed in a swathe of flowers,
The corn a golden ear-ring on her cheek,
Has left our north to winter's finer etching,
To raw-boned winter, when the sun
Slinks in a narrow and a furtive arc,
Red as the harvest moon, from east to west,

THE LAND—WINTER

And the swans go home at dusk to the leaden lake *Winter*
Dark in the plains of snow.

Water alone remains untouched by snow.

Here is no colour, here but form and structure,
The bones of trees, the magpie bark of birches,
Apse of trees and tracery of network,
Fields of snow and tranquil trees in snow
Through veils of twilight, northern, still, and sad,
Waiting for night, and for the moon
Riding the sky and turning snow to beauty,
Pale in herself as winter's very genius,
Casting the shadows delicate of trees,
Moon-shadows on the moon-lit snow, the ghost
Of shadows, veering with the moving moon,
Faint as the markings on the silver coin
Risen in heaven,—shades of barren ranges,
Craters, and lunar Apennines, and plains
Old as the earth, and cold as space, and empty,
Whence Earth appears a planet far surpassing
Our ken of any star for neighbouring splendour,
Her continents, her seas, her mountain ranges
Splendid and visible, majestic planet
Sweeping through space, and bearing in her train
Her silver satellite that sees no strife,
No warring of her men, no grief, no anger,
No blood spilt red to stain the golden planet,
But sees her architecture royally:
Dark Asia; islands; spread of the Pacific,

COLLECTED POEMS

Winter The silver satellite that casts the ghost
Of ghostly trees across the fields of snow.

Now in the radiant night no men are stirring:
The little houses sleep with shuttered panes;
Only the hares are wakeful, loosely loping
Along the hedges with their easy gait,
And big loose ears, and pad-prints crossing snow;
The ricks and trees stand silent in the moon,
Loaded with snow, and tiny drifts from branches
Slip to the ground in woods with sliding sigh.
Private the woods, enjoying a secret beauty.

Vagrant But one man comes, one outcast and a vagrant
Having no roof to keep him from the snow;
Comes with a shuffling step between the trees;
Vague, old; and sinks upon a fallen bole,
Merging himself in night till silence gains him,
And hares play fearless round him in the shadows
Cast by the moon. Whence comes he? what have been
His annals? what but annals of long roads,
All roads alike, made sharp by hostile eyes,
—Rightly, he yields it, in his resignation.
Whence has he shambled, into snow-bound Kent?
Out of what night of lassitude and despair
Into this night of beauty and cold death?
What sire begot, what mother cradled him?
He drowns on his bole, while snow-flakes gather,
While snow-flakes drift and gather,

THE LAND—WINTER

Touching his darkness with their white, until
He grows to an idol in the wood forgotten,
Image of what men were, to silence frozen,
Image of contemplation and enigma,
So stiffens in his death. His old coat covers
His heart's vain hieroglyph. But still the hares
Play hopscotch with the shadows, having less fear
Of death's quiescence than of life's quick danger,
In a world where men are truant, night to dawn,
Suspended hours when life's poor common business
Lies dormant in a world to silence given,
Given to silence and the slanting moon.

Vagrant

Only the shepherd watching by his flock
Sees the moon wax and wane; endures the time
When frost is sharpest; hears the steeple chime
Each hour neglected; hears the rutting brock
Scream in the night; the prowling dog-fox bark;
Snared rabbit cry, small tragedy of dark.

*Shep-
herd*

The shepherd watching by his ewes and theaves
All night in loneliness, each cry knows well,
Whether the early lambing on the Downs
Rob him of Christmas, or on slopes of fell
March keep him crouching, shawled against the sleet;
But there's a cry that drowns
All else to shepherd's ears: the wavering bleat
Of weakling newly-born: then he shall lift
The lanky baby to his own warm hut,

COLLECTED POEMS

*Shep-
herd* Lay it on straw, and shift
Closer the lamp, and set the bottle's teat
With good warm milk between the lips half-shut,
Coaxing the doubtful life, while wind and rain
Against the window of the cabin beat,
And homing cottars in the plain below
Look up, and seeing the window's yellow glow,
Mutter, "The shepherd's at his job again".

Poor heavy-sided ewes must have their care;
Pasture, and in their pens a bite of hay.
Poor roots, good lambs; good roots, poor lambs, they
say;
So shall the prudent shepherd keep them spare,
And likewise short of cake before they ean;
And he shall set the double hurdles square
Against the north and east with straw between,
For shelter; he shall run his ewes and lambs
In various pens: the twins, the little rams,
And frolic younglings just about to wean;
He shall turn little rams to little tegs,
And dock their tails, but on a different day;
Then, well content, sit down to watch them play,
Companioned by his pipe and trowsled pup;
Watch them, appraising strong and frisky legs,
And grin when little ewe butts little tup.

Yeoman But while the shepherd lonely in his cotes
Lives the harsh months decreed,

THE LAND—WINTER

Yeoman

The farmer, thwarted by the early dusk,
Uses the hours that keep his ploughman lusk,
And plans his year for pasture or for seed.
Champion and several each claim their meed;
Fallow, and arable, and clover ley;
Shall the Ten-Acre carry sheep or oats?
Shall the poor Roughets stand this year for hay?

For now when fields beneath the wintry light
Lie stark, and snow along the hedgerow clings,
When streams of rooks on swerving wings
Blacken the sky with their untidy flight,
When iron ridges bind the frozen clay,
And sunset reddens cart-ruts on the road,—
Now in the wolf-month, shrammed and gaunt,
When vixens prowl, and hopping birds grow bold,
And craven otters haunt
The coops, by famine driven, and by cold,—
There's little chance for labour on the land.
Only the dung-cart with its reasty load
Creaks safe across the fields on frozen ground,
And horses for the fork or shovel stand
Patient, their nostrils smoking on the air.
Carting's a winter job. The strawy mound,
The wedge-shaped hale of roots for winter feeding
stored,
Gapes, and gives up its rolling, orange hoard,
Cut in the farmyard troughs to equal share.
There's little else in these dead months to keep
The farm-folks brisk; at dawn and dusk they go

COLLECTED POEMS

Yeoman To break the ice on inky water-holes;
Fold on fresh patch of swedes the fattening sheep;
Put in a casual hour to dig out moles.
All desultory tasks, while the short day
Dulls from the morning's red to undern grey,
And dyes to red again as sun sinks low.

Then pencil in hand beneath the hanging lamp
The farmer ponders in the kitchen's hush;
In the dark shippon tranquil cattle crush
Sweet cake, sliced mangold; shift, and blow, and
champ;

In the dark stable tired horses stamp,
And nuzzle at the manger for their feed.
But though the homesteads in such stillness doze
Under the double spell of night and frost,
Within the yeoman's kitchen scheme
The year revolves its immemorial prose.
He reckons labour, reckons too the cost;
Mates up his beasts, and sees his calf-run teem;
Takes pigs to market underneath a net;
Sees blossom on his orchards in the spring;
Sees rows of roots, all plump and stoutly set,
And hears the windy barley hiss
Like golden snakes before good harvesting;
And, since no little winsel comes amiss,
Cozens the dullards that go marketing.

He'd cheat a fool indeed, but do no worse;
His heart is wider than his purse,

Take all in all; but narrower than each
The portals of his speech.
Few words must serve his turn,
For he's sagacious who lives taciturn,
And airs no noisy cunning of his trade,
But keeps his private purpose deeply laid;
Gives neighbours nothing of his confidence,
And takes his counsel of his own good sense.
No wise man utters what he inly knows;
Certainty in a loose uncertain world
Is far too firm a treasure; wiseman goes
Jealous and wary, keeping darkly furled
His small particular knowledge. So he plots
To get the better of his lands again;
Compels, coerces, sets in trim, allots,
Renews the old campaign.
His mind is but the map of his estate,
No broader than his acres, fenced and bound
Within the little England of his ground,
Squared neat between the hedgerows of his brain,
With here Lord's Meadow tilted on a hill,
And Scallops' Coppice ending in a gate,
And here the Eden passing by a mill,
And there the barn with thatch,
And here a patch of gorse, and there a patch
Of iris on the fringes of a pond,
And here Brook Orchard banded safe with grease;
All this he sees, and nothing sees beyond
The limits and the fealty of his lease.
Tenant of his inheritance,

COLLECTED POEMS

Yeoman Brief link in life's long circumstance,
One of the nameless, name-forgotten line
Descended from that nameless ancestor
Who cut a holding in the serried weald
Where droves of swine
Rootled for acorns underneath the oaks,
Anderida's sole yield
When Drake played bowls at Plymouth, and the rare
Coach with the cumbrous spokes
Trundled along the single clay-wet track
To Sussex with drawn blinds, or journeyed back
To London on affairs of state, the fine
Heraldic blazon eloquent on the door;
Makers of land, one of the nameless line
That fenced, and tilled, and overcame the waste,
And cut the necessary gaps,
And shaped the fields, slow-paced,
Into their permanent design,
Each field with local name, not marked on maps,
How come by, how begotten,
Long since forgotten:
Clement's, the Roundabout, Black Mead and Bitter
Docks,
Rough Shepherd, Horses' Houghs,
And trod the path that grew into this lane
Bending between the hedgerows, where
Convenience claimed a road,—for country road
Is natural growth, with here a curve
Skirting a tree felled long ago, a swerve
To let the rattling harrow pass, the wain

With trussed and swaying load
Lurch safely by, and empty pass again.

Yeoman

He tills the soil to-day,
Surly and grave, his difficult wage to earn.
Cities of discontent, the sickened nerve,
Are still a fashion that he will not learn.
His way is still the obstinate old way,
Even though his horses stare above the hedge,
And whinny, while the tractor drives its wedge
Where they were wont to serve,
And iron robs them of their privilege.
Still is his heart not given
To such encroachments on a natural creed;
Not wholly given, though he bows to need
By urgency and competition driven,
And vanity, to follow with the tide.
Still with a secret triumph he will say,
"Tractor for sand, maybe, but horse for clay",
And in his calling takes a stubborn pride
That nature still defeats
The frowsty science of the cloistered men,
Their theory, their conceits;
The faith within him still derides the pen,
Experience his text-book. What have they,
The bookish townsmen in their dry retreats,
Known of December dawns, before the sun
Reddened the east, and fields were wet and grey?
When have they gone, another day begun,
By tracks into a quagmire trodden,

COLLECTED POEMS

Yeoman With sacks about their shoulders and the damp
Soaking until their very souls were sodden,
To help a sick beast, by a flickering lamp,
With rough words and kind hands?
Or felt their boots so heavy and so swere
With trudging over cledgy lands,
Held fast by earth, being to earth so near?

Book-learning they have known.
They meet together, talk, and grow most wise,
But they have lost, in losing solitude,
Something,—an inward grace, the seeing eyes,
The power of being alone;
The power of being alone with earth and skies,
Of going about a task with quietude,
Aware at once of earth's surrounding mood
And of an insect crawling on a stone.

SPRING

*THE peddler and the reddleman
Go vagrant through the shires.
The peddler tempts the farmer's wife
With all she most admires,
With beads, and boxes made of shells,
With lace and huckaback,
Buckles for shoes and rings for ears,
And Old Moore's Almanack,
With tapes and bobbins, pins and thread,
"What lack you? what d'you lack?"*

*Fra-
ternity*

*The reddleman from head to foot
Dyed in his scarlet dye,
Leans like the Devil on the gate,
And grins when children cry.
"Redd for your sheep today, shepherd?
Redd for your yoes and rams?
I never broke a tup's leg yet
Or scared the mothering dams.
You'll find me natty at my job,
And gentle with the lambs."*

*The tinker and the boggart both
Long since have learnt by rote
How cold the rain and sharp the wind*

COLLECTED POEMS

*Fra-
ternity*

*Drive through a ragged coat.
The tinker with his little cart
Hawking his tinny wares,
Puts down his head against the sleet
And whimpers for repairs.
"Kind lady, patch your pots and pans,
And mend your broken chairs?"*

*The boggart on the frosty ridge,
His sleeveless arms held wide,
Stands gaunt against the wintry sky
Forever crucified,
A raven perched upon his hat,
About his feet the crows.
How bleak December turns the fields,
How desolate the snows,
How long the nights and short the days,
Tatterdemalion knows.*

Spring There's no beginning to the farmer's year,
Only recurrent patterns on a scroll
Unwinding; only use in step with need,
Sharp on the minute when the minute's come;
A watching, waiting thole,
A reckoning by rule-of-thumb.
You may see wealden farmers plough for seed
Before July is out, or dung and drudge
Midsummer yet being here,
Using the drought to carry horse and wain,

THE LAND—SPRING

Else sinks the hoof to the fetlock, axles strain,
Tines choke. Let farmers do as farmers judge.

Spring

Therefore let no man say, "Peas shall be sown
This month or that; now shall the harrow go;
Now scuffle with deep coulter, now with shallow;
Wheat shall succeed to clover; oats to fallow;
Roots after wheat be grown";
Such arbitrary dates and rules are vain;
Not thus the year's arithmetic is planned,
But to outwit the cunning of the land
That will not yield, and will not yield again
Her due of food and wealth
Unless the moment's twisted to its use,
Wrung to the utmost by a vigilant hand,
Admitting no unseasonable excuse.

Nevertheless with spring come certain tasks,
The sowing of crops, as last year's store sinks low
Watch for the day when well-conditioned tilth,
—Run by the winter frost, made sweet by rain,—
Crumbles beneath the foot, and warmly basks
In open fields between the budding shaws;
Such time when first the rainbow spans its arch
And settling plover wheel, and ragged daws
Firk on the plough, in the first fair days of March,
With the faint tinkle of a wether's bell;
Days when the sky is wide and pale,
Washed by shed rain, swept clear of cloud

*Sowing
of crops*

COLLECTED POEMS

Sowing By a forgotten gale;
of crops Bare twiggy copses, uplands newly ploughed,
 Cart-tracks, gate-gaps in hedges, everything
 Wearing its winter aspect with a difference
 Not visible to eye, (not visible
 Save in close seeing, in the burgeoning
 Of a myriad black and thorny joints,)
 Still spare and wintry to the outward eye,
 But with what change to the sense,
 What readiness, what waiting! the suspense
 Of earth laid open, naked to the spring.
 Such days as these the wary man appoints
 For sowing where his earlier foresight tilled,
 And harrows cleared the ground of couch and
 stones.

Yet will his patience still endure delay
 If weather's contrary; let boisterous March go by,
 Let even April temper into May
 Before he entrusts the furrow straitly drilled
 With precious grain. He knows the clay,
 Malevolent, unkind, a spiteful slave;
 Has he not felt its rancour in his bones?
 Gashed it with share and mattock? torn its flesh?
 Has he not stood beside some new-dug grave
 In that same churchyard where himself shall lie,
 And seen the yellow pit? the clods turned fresh?
 Shall he entrust his summer's hope, his pence,
 His cattle's fodder, and his children's bread,
 Rashly to that inhospitable bed?
 No, rather shall he leave his land unsown

THE LAND—SPRING

A month or more, if acres will not dry.
Occasion's always timely, not so haste;
And month from month takes many an usurer's
loan.

*Sowing
of crops*

So, with his pocket full of tricks,
His dodges girded on, his cunning braced,
He waits his time, to master and defeat,
For he, like other men, must live by politics.
Thus, if the autumn rains have drowned his wheat,
He shall put oats in April in its stead;
Or if a field be obstinate in weeds,
Set clearing crops from February to June:
Roots that will shelter partridges, and swedes,
And mangolds orange as the harvest-moon.
So shall he fill his barns and build his ricks,
Sowing in spring his barley, oats, and seeds,
(But in the autumn, wheat, and the neglected rye,) *Rotation
of crops*
And ever shall he bear in mind the art
Known to the Roman, of a changing crop,
To keep his land in kindly heart,
Following wheat on clover, roots on grain,
Fallow on cereal, as he judges best
To mend his weary land and give it rest,
And spare the toiling of his horse and cart
With dung to spread. So shall he make his gain
And please his fields, and profits shall not drop
Nor men be idle.

Yet another care,
The pruning and the training of the hop,
Busies the farmer while the year is young.

Hops

COLLECTED POEMS

Hops When vines are cut and cleaned, and poles are bare,
And loam is richly black with farmyard dung,
Then comes the pruning-knife, and severs clean
Unwanted shoots; the young, too prodigal green
Falls cut, and sadly wilts
There on the ground; but then with balls of twine
Come men on high, strapped stilts,
Woodenly walking, taller than the poles,
Pocking the ground with small round holes,
To tie the string to train the chosen vine,
With a little crawling gang of boys
Busily tying in amongst the hills.
But all's not over then; the rapid plant
Wreathing its spiral upright or aslant,
This delicate tendrilled thing, this English vine,
Has baleful foes that prey:
Aphis, that bitter poison kills,
And mould, that sulphur-dust destroys.
So against knave and thief
Work with unsparing hand your sulphur spray
In early morning when the dew
Lies on the sickened leaf,
Till the clean air with yellow powder fills,
And the bare garden floats in dusty gold;
Not once, but be you watchful to renew
Strife against insect, battle against mould.

Or- Look to your orchards in the early spring.
chards The blossom-weevil bores into the sheath,

THE LAND—SPRING

Grubs tunnel in the pith of promising shoots,
The root-louse spends his winter tucked beneath
Rough bark of trunks or chinks of tangled roots;
Canker, rot, scab, and mildew blight the tree;
There seems an enemy in everything.

*Or-
chards*

Even the bullfinch with his pretty song,
And blue puffed tits make havoc in the pears
Pecking with tiny beak and strong;
Mild February airs
Are full of rogues on mischievous wing,
And orchard trees are wickedly tenanted
By crawling pirates newly roused from sloth,
The apple-sucker and wood-leopard moth;
Who'd win his fight must wage a constant war,
Have sense in his fingers, eyes behind his head;
Therefore let foresight race ahead of time,
Spray close and well
With soap and sulphur, quassia, lead, and lime,
When buds begin to swell,
All to defeat some small conspirator.

Sometimes in apple country you may see
A ghostly orchard standing all in white,
Aisles of white trees, white branches, in the green,
On some still day when the year hangs between
Winter and spring, and heaven is full of light.
And rising from the ground pale clouds of smoke
Float through the trees and hang upon the air,
Trailing their wisps of blue like a swelled cloak
From the round cheeks of breezes. But though fair

COLLECTED POEMS

Or- To him who leans upon the gate to stare
chards And muse "How delicate in spring they be,
That mobled blossom and that wimpled tree",
There is a purpose in the cloudy aisles
That took no thought of beauty for its care.
For here's the beauty of all country miles,
Their rolling pattern and their space:
That there's a reason for each changing square,
Here sleeping fallow, there a meadow mown,
All to their use ranged different each year,
The shaven grass, the gold, the brindled roan,
Not in some search for empty grace,
But fine through service and intent sincere.

Young Nor shall you for your fields neglect your stock;
Stock Spring is the season when the young things thrive,
Having the kindly months before them. Lambs,
Already sturdy, straggle from the flock;
Frisk tails; tug grass-tufts; stare at children; prance;
Then panic-stricken scuttle for their dams.
Calves learn to drink from buckets; foals
Trot laxly in the meadow, with soft glance
Inquisitive; barn, sty and shed
Teem with young innocence newly come alive.
Round collie puppies, on the sunny step,
Buffet each other with their duffer paws
And pounce at flies, and nose the plaited skep,
And with tucked tail slink yelping from the hive.
Likewise the little secret beasts

THE LAND—SPRING

That open eyes on a world of death and dread,
Thirst, hunger, and mishap,
The covert denizens of holts and shaws,
The little creatures of the ditch and hedge,
Mice nested in a tussock, shrews, and voles,
Inhabitants of the wood,
The red-legged dabchick, paddling in the sedge,
Followed by chubby brood;
The vixen, prick-eared for the first alarm
Beside her tumbling cubs at foot of tree,—
All in the spring begin their precarious round,
Not cherished as the striplings on the farm,
Sheltered, and cosseted, and kept from harm,
But fang and claw against them, snare and trap,
For life is perilous to the small wild things,
Danger's their lot, and fears abound;
Great cats destroy unheedful wings,
And nowhere's safety on the hunted ground;
And who's to blame them, though they be
Sly, as a man would think him shame?
Man in security walks straight and free,
And shall not measure blame,
For they, that each on other preys,
Weasel on rabbit, owl on shrew,
Their cowardly and murderous ways
In poor defence of life pursue,
Not for a wanton killing, not for lust,
As stags will fight among the trampled brake
With antlers running red; with gore and thrust,
With hoofs that stamp, and royal heads that shake

*Young
Stock*

COLLECTED POEMS

Young Blood from their eyes,—in vain,
Stock Since still their splendid anger keeps them blind,
And lowers their entangled brows again,
For brief possession of a faithless hind;—
Not thus, but furtive through the rustling leaves
Life preys on little life; the frightened throat
Squeals once beneath the yellow bite of stoat,
Destroyers all, necessity of kind;
Talon rips fur, and fang meets sharper fang,
And even sleeping limbs must be alert.
But fortunate, if death with sudden pang
Leaps, and is ended; if no lingering hurt,
Dragging a broken wing or mangled paw,
Brings the slow anguish that no night reprieves,
In the dark refuge of a lonely shaw.

So do they venture on their chance of life
When months seem friendliest; so shall men
Repair their herds in spring by natural law
In byre and farrowing pen.
Thus shall you do, with calves that you would rear,
—Heifer, not driven to the slaughterer's knife,
And bull-calf, early cut from bull to steer,—
Two to one udder run, till they may feed
Alone; then turn the little foster-siblings out;
Or wean from birth, and teach to drink from pail,
With fair allowance of their mother's milk,
(But watch, for as the calf grows hale,
He's rough, and knocks the empty pail about.)
By either method shall you safely breed

THE LAND—SPRING

Moist muzzles, thrifty coats of silk,
Well-uddered heifers, bullocks strong and stout.

*Young
Stock*

The wise man, too, will keep his stock of bees
In a sheltered corner of his garden patch,
Where they may winter warmly, breed and hatch
New swarms to fill his combs and fertilize his
trees.

*Bee-
Master*

I have known honey from the Syrian hills
Stored in cool jars; the wild acacia there
On the rough terrace where the locust shrills,
Tosses her spindrift to the ringing air;
Narcissus bares his nectarous perianth
In white and golden tabard to the sun,
And while the workers rob the amaranth
Or scarlet windflower low among the stone
Intent upon their crops,
The Syrian queens mate in the high hot day,
Rapt visionaries of creative fray,
Soaring from fecund ecstasy alone,
While through the blazing ether, drops
Like a small thunderbolt the vindicated drone.

I have known bees within the ruined arch
Of Akbar's crimson city hang their comb;
Swarm in forsaken courts in a sultry March,
Where the mild ring-doves croon, and small apes
play,

COLLECTED POEMS

Bee- And the thin mangy jackal makes his home;
Master And where, the red walls kindling in the flares,
Once the great Moghul lolling on his throne,
Between his languid fingers crumbling spice,
Ordered his women to the chequered squares,
And moved them at the hazard of the dice.

But this is the bee-master's reckoning
In England. Walk among the hives and hear.

Forget not bees in winter, though they sleep,
For winter's big with summer in her womb,
And when you plant your rose-trees, plant them
 deep,
Having regard to bushes all aflame,
And see the dusky promise of their bloom
In small red shoots, and let each redolent name—
Tuscany, Crested Cabbage, Cottage Maid—
Load with full June November's dank repose;
See the kind cattle drowsing in the shade,
And hear the bee about his amorous trade,
Brown in the gipsy crimson of the rose.

In February, if the days be clear,
The waking bee, still drowsy on the wing,
Will guess the opening of another year
And blunder out to seek another spring.
Crashing through winter sunlight's pallid gold,
His clumsiness sets catkins on the willow
Ashake like lambs' tails in the early fold,

THE LAND—SPRING

Dusting with pollen all his brown and yellow,
But when the rimy afternoon turns cold
And undern squalls buffet the chilly fellow,
He'll seek the hive's warm waxen welcoming
And set about the chambers' classic mould.

*Bee-
Master*

And then pell-mell his harvest follows swift,
Blossom and borage, lime and balm and clover,
On Downs the thyme, on cliffs the scantling
thrift,

Everywhere bees go racing with the hours,
For every bee becomes a drunken lover,
Standing upon his head to sup the flowers.
All over England, from Northumbrian coasts,
To the wild sea-pink blown on Devon rocks,
Over the merry southern gardens, over
The grey-green bean-fields, round the Kentish
oasts,

Through the frilled spires of cottage hollyhocks,
Go the big brown fat bees, and wander in
Where dusty spears of sunlight cleave the barn,
And seek the sun again, and storm the whin,
And in the warm meridian solitude
Hum in the heather round the moorland tarn.

Look, too, when summer hatches out the brood,
In tardy May or early June,
And the young queens are strong in the cocoon,
Watch, if the days be warm,
The flitting of the swarm.

COLLECTED POEMS

Bee- Follow, for if beyond your sight they stray,
Master Your bees are lost, and you must take your way
Homeward disconsolate; but be at hand
And you may take your bees on strangers' land.
Have your skep ready, drowse them with your
smoke;

Whether they cluster on the handy bough
Or in the difficult hedge, be nimble now,
For bees are captious folk
And quick to turn against the lubber's touch,
But if you shake them to their wicker hutch
Firmly, and turn towards the hive your skep,
Into the hive the clustered thousands stream,
Mounting the little slatted sloping step,
A ready colony, queen, workers, drones,
Patient to build again the waxen thrones
For younger queens, and all the chambered cells
For lesser brood, and all the immemorial scheme.

And still they labour, though the hand of man
Inscrutable and ravaging descend,
Pillaging in their citadels,
Defeating wantonly their provident plan,
Making a havoc of their patient hoard;
Still silly bees, not knowing to what end,
Not knowing to what ultimate reward
Or what new ruin of the garnered hive
The senseless god in man will send,
Still in blind stupid industry will strive,
Constructing for destruction pitiaibly,

THE LAND—SPRING

That still their unintelligible lord
May reap his wealth from their calamity.

*Bee-
Master*

White virgin honey comes from earliest flowers,
White virgin honey in the market prized;
From the white clover creeping in the field,
From orchard-blossom that the worker scours,
—The richest honey-flow of all the Weald,—
But cottage-gardens shall not be despised
Here where no heather is, and scanty lime;
Therefore, at evening, when the field-work's done,
And daylight lingers with the latening sun,
Let gardeners too remember sowing-time.

When skies are gentle, breezes bland,
When loam that's warm within the hand
Falls friable between the tines,
Sow hollyhocks and columbines,
The tufted pansy, and the tall
Snapdragon in the broken wall,
Not for this summer, but for next,
Since foresight is the gardener's text,
And though his eyes may never know
How lavishly his flowers blow,
Others will stand and musing say
"These were the flowers he sowed that May".

*Gar-
dener*

But for this summer's quick delight
Sow marigold, and sow the bright

COLLECTED POEMS

Gar- Frail poppy that with noonday dies
dener But wakens to a fresh surprise;
Along the pathway stones be set
Sweet Alysson and mignonette,
That when the full midsummer's come
On scented clumps the bees may hum,
Golden Italians, and the wild
Black humble-bee alike beguiled:
And lovers who have never kissed
May sow the cloudy Love-in-Mist.

Nor be the little space forgot
For herbs to spice the kitchen pot:
Tarragon and melilot,
Dill for witchcraft, prisoners' rue,
Coriander, costmary,
Tansy, thyme, Sweet Cicely,
Saffron, balm, and rosemary
That since the Virgin threw her cloak
Across it,—so say cottage folk—
Has changed its flowers from white to blue.
But have a care that seeds be strewn
One night beneath a waxing moon,
And pick when moon is on the wane,
Else shall your toil be all in vain.

The *She walks among the loveliness she made,*
Island *Between the apple-blossom and the water—*
She walks among the patterned pied brocade,

THE LAND—SPRING

*The
Island*

*Each flower her son, and every tree her daughter.
This is an island all with flowers inlaid,
A square of grassy pavement tessellated;
Flowers in their order blowing as she bade,
And in their company by her created.
The waving grasses freckle sun with shade,
The wind-blown waters round the kingcups ripple,
Colour on colour chequered and arrayed,
Shadow on light in variable stipple.
Her regiments at her command parade,
Foot-soldier primrose in his rank comes trooping,
Then wind-flowers in a scarlet loose brigade,
Fritillary with dusky orchis grouping.
They are the Cossacks, dim in ambuscade,
Scarfed in their purple like a foreign stranger,
Piratical, and apt for stealthy raid,
Wherever's mystery or doubtful danger.
Iris salutes her with his broad green blade,
And marches by with proud imperial pennant,
And tulips in a flying cavalcade
Follow valerian for their lieutenant.
The Lords-and-Ladies dressed for masquerade
In green silk domino discreetly hooded,
Hurry towards the nut-trees' colonnade,
Philandering where privacy's well wooded;
They're the civilians of this bold crusade,
The courtiers of this camp by blossom tented,
With woodbine clambering the balustrade,
And all by briar roses battlemented.
There, in the sunlit grasses green as jade,*

COLLECTED POEMS

The Island *She walks; she sees her squadrons at attention,
And, laughing at her flowery escapade,
Stretches her hands towards her dear invention.*

The wild flowers This much of gardens; but I tell
Also of native flowers in wood and dell;
Not such as, sudden on a stony height,
Break from the warmth of snow and live in light
Of mountain sun on Alp or Dolomite,
Bright squabs on limestone screes;
Not of the Rhoetian poppy, fluttering brave
Frail yellow flags beside a rocky track
Alone with eagles; not of these,
Not of the thymes that greenly pave
A fallen cliff, rock-rose in cruel crack;
Not of the scarlet tulip, slim and bright,
Snapped by the gallop of the wild gazelle;
But of such flowers as dwell
In marsh and meadow, wayside, wood and waste,
Of campion and the little pimpernel;
Of kexen parsley and the varied vetch;
Of the living mesh, cats-cradle in a ditch;
Of gorse and broom and whins;
Of hops and buckwheat and the wild woodbine
That with their stems must twine
Like the way of the sun to left from right;
Of berried bindweeds, twisting widdershins;
Of all the tangle of the hedgerow, laced
With thorny dog-rose and the deadly dwale;

THE LAND—SPRING

Throughout the seasons do I count their tale,
But orderly, that those who walk abroad
In lane and wood

*The
wood-
flowers*

May find them in their season as they grow;
Anemones like some last drift of snow
Between the hazels, hanging down their bell
When rain's about; small woodruff low;
Bugles, that leave the shelter of the glade
And march across the open; violets that blow
Purple and dim at tree's-foot; and the tall
Orchis that country children call

By many names, some pretty and some rude.
These are the flowers that shelter in the wood
Sulky in colour, secret in the shade;

But wayside tramps, saucy and unafraid,
Jack-by-the-hedge, Pickpocket, Ragged Robin,
Small yellows and small scarlets, nowise strange,
Nowise like aliens strayed,

*The
wayside
flowers*

But English and robust,
Fight tangled for their life through grit and dust,
Pushing their way with spring, when heifers
range

Uneasy up the lane, and as they go
Tug at a passing mouthful, biting harsh.
And others in the meadow and the marsh
Make rings round Easter; kingcup, marigold,
And the pale orchis dappled like a dobbin;
Buttercups thousand-fold
Wearing their cloth-of-gold among the hay
With clover and the little eye-of-day.

COLLECTED POEMS

Fritillaries—Once I went through the lanes, over the sharp
Tilt of the little bridges; past the forge,
And heard the clang of anvil and of iron,
And saw the founting sparks in the dusky forge,
And men outside with horses, gossiping.
So I came through that April England, moist
And green in its lush fields between the willows,
Foaming with cherry in the woods, and pale
With clouds of lady's-smock along the hedge,
Until I came to a gate and left the road
For the gentle fields that enticed me, by the
farms,
Wandering through the embroidered fields, each
one
So like its fellow; wandered through the gaps,
Past the mild cattle knee-deep in the brooks,
And wandered drowsing as the meadows drowsed
Under the pale wide heaven and slow clouds.
And then I came to a field where the springing grass
Was dulled by the hanging cups of fritillaries,
Sullen and foreign-looking, the snaky flower,
Scarfed in dull purple, like Egyptian girls
Camping among the furze, staining the waste
With foreign colour, sulky, dark, and quaint,
Dangerous too, as a girl might sidle up,
An Egyptian girl, with an ancient snaring spell,
Throwing a net, soft round the limbs and heart,
Captivity soft and abhorrent, a close-meshed net,
—See the square web on the murrey flesh of the
flower—

THE LAND—SPRING

Holding her captive close with her bare brown arms. *Fritillaries*
Close to her little breast beneath the silk,
A gipsy Judith, witch of a ragged tent,
And I shrank from the English field of fritillaries
Before it should be too late, before I forgot
The cherry white in the woods, and the curdled
clouds,
And the lapwings crying free above the plough.

The spring was late that year, I well remember. *Spring*
The year when first I came on the field of fritillaries;

So late, the cottars meeting in the lanes
Would stop to marvel mildly, with that old
Unplumbed capacity for wonderment
At Nature's whim. The calendar told spring,
But spring was heedless: April into May
Passed, and the trees still wore their livery
Of lean black winter's servants; very strange
Most lovely Easter played three days at summer,
A heavy summer over winter's fields,
Three days, and then was vanished, like a queen
Dropping the lifted flap of her pavilion.

Nightly I leant me at the window-sill,
Telling the chaplet of the slipping days,
But still the lamp streamed wet on polished stones,
And still the nights were empty silences
Robbed of the nightingale; they only held

COLLECTED POEMS

Spring The slanting strings of rain: Orion marched
Invisible down the hours from dusk to dawn.
Till morning pallor lost him, but the clouds
Hid all his gradual latening; that year
He shot his midnight javelins unseen
And dipped the horizon into other skies,
Lost to the North, till autumn should renew
His captaincy, with Rigel, Betelgeuse,
Aldebaran, and brightest Sirius.

Have we so many springs allotted us,
And who would rob a pauper of his pence?

Then broke the spring. The hedges in a day
Burgeoned to green; the drawing of the trees,
Incomparably pencilled line by line,
Thickened to heaviness, and men forgot
The intellectual austerity
Of winter, in the rich warm-blooded rush
Of growth, and mating beasts, and rising sap.
How swift and sudden strode that tardy spring,
Between a sunrise and a sunset come!
The shadow of a swallow crossed the wall;
Nightingales sang by day. The pushing blade
Parted the soil. The morning roofs and oasts
There, down the lane, beside the brook and willows,
Cast their long shadows. Pasture, ankle-wet,
Steamed to the sun. The tulips dyed their green
To red in cottage gardens. Bees astir,
Fussing from flower to flower, made war on time.

THE LAND—SPRING

Spring

Body and blood were princes; the cold mind
Sank with Orion from the midnight sky;
The stars of spring rose visible: The Virgin;
Al Fard the solitary; Regulus
The kingly star, the handle of the Sickle;
And Venus, lonely splendour in the west,
Roamed over the rapt meadows; shone in gold
Beneath the cottage eaves where nesting birds
Obeyed love's law; shone through the cottage panes
Where youth lay sleeping on the breast of youth,
Where love was life, and not a brief desire;
Shone on the heifer blaring for the bull
Over the hedgerow deep in dewy grass:
And glinted through the dark and open door
Where the proud stallion neighing to his mares
Stamped on the cobbles of the stable floor.
For all were equal in the sight of spring,
Man and his cattle; corn; and greening trees,
Ignorant of the soul's perplexity,
Ignorant of the wherefore and the end,
Bewildered by no transient ecstasy,
But following the old and natural law,
Nor marred nor blazing with a royal excess;
The law of life and life's continuance.

That was a spring of storms. They prowled the
 night;
Low level lightning flickered in the east
Continuous. The white pear-blossom gleamed
Motionless in the flashes; birds were still;

COLLECTED POEMS

Spring Darkness and silence knotted to suspense,
Riven by the premonitory glint
Of skulking storm, a giant that whirled a sword
Over the low horizon, and with tread
Earth-shaking ever threatened his approach,
But to delay his terror kept afar,
And held earth stayed in waiting like a beast
Bowed to receive a blow. But when he strode
Down from his throne of hills upon the plain,
And broke his anger to a thousand shards
Over the prostrate fields, then leapt the earth
Proud to accept his challenge; drank his rain;
Under his sudden wind tossed wild her trees;
Opened her secret bosom to his shafts;
The great drops spattered; then above the house
Crashed thunder, and the little wainscot shook
And the green garden in the lightning lay.

Who has not seen the spring, is blind, is dead.
Better for him that he should confined lie,
And in that coin his toll to Nature pay
Than live a debtor. All things shall pass by
That fret his mind: the shift of policy,
Princes' ambition, wiser governance,
Civilisation's tides. There's dissonance
By our great necessary Babel bred,
Perplexes eager spirits unprepared,
Puts out their seeing eyes, leaves their blind touch
To grope past prejudice and ignorance
Towards solution, as they throw away

THE LAND—SPRING

Spring

Each broken, each successive crutch.
Such truths as we have snared
Into the spread conspiracy of our nets,
Come to us fragmentary from a whole,
As meteorites from space. Now science sets
Two splintered ends together, makes one shred
Corroborate another; now live flesh
Persuades us by its drunken fallacy;
Now the instinctive soul
Takes its short-cut to grace; now blown by gust
Of hazard, truth's entangled in strange mesh,
Else how should poetry,
The runes of divination, superstition
Fastening sharp claw on common circumstance,
Even artifice as neat astrology
Twisting the very stars to fit man's ends,
Mingle some ore with dross of sorcery
Unless the fragment of the whole be part?
There's some relation we may not adjust,
Some concord of creation that the mind
Only in perilous balance apprehends,
Loth, fugitive, obscure.
All else dies in its season; all perplexities,
Even human grief with human body dies,
Such griefs that press so wildly on the heart
As to crush in its shell. But still endure
Nature's renewal and man's fortitude,
A common thing, a permanent common thing,
So coarse, so stated, usual, and so rude,
So quiet in performance, and so slow

COLLECTED POEMS

Spring That hurrying wit outruns it. Yet with spring
Life leaps; her fountains flow;
And nimble foolish wit must humbled go.

There were, so many days that I was given.
But whether of this spring or that? they merge
As travelling clouds across my permanent heaven.

My life was rich; I took a swarm of bees
And found a crumpled snake-skin on the road,
All in one day, and was increased by these.

I have not understood humanity.
But those plain things, that gospel of each year,
Made me the scholar of simplicity.

*This once I saw, but not again,
Above the water pocked by rain:
Three mottled eggs in a moorhen's nest,
In a clump of kingcups by the edge
Of the water, in amongst the sedge;
The rain was but an April shower;
The kingcup but a minted flower,
Cup of a king in gold.
Was there not once a king who sought him
The perfect chalice, and bethought him
The breast of Helen for his mould?
A wild bird's nest and Helen's breast,
What lovely things that spring did hold!*

* * * * *

THE LAND—SPRING

Now die the sounds. No whisper stirs the trees.

*Noc-
turne*

Her pattern merged into the general web,
The shriven day accepts her obsequies
With humble ebb.

Now are the noiseless stars made visible
That hidden by the day pursued their track,
And this one planet that we know too well
Mantles in black.

Then, from the thicket, sang the nightingale,
So wildly sweet, so sudden, and so true,
It seemed a herald from beyond the veil
Had broken through.

The common earth's confusion all unseen,
But worlds revealed in broad magnificence,—
That unembodied music thrird between
Sprang hence, or thence?

Nothing remained of the familiar round,
Only the soul ecstatic and released
Founted towards the spheres in jets of sound,
And died, and ceased,

But plangent from the thickets of the thorn
Broke other voices, taking up the choir,
While Cancer interlaced with Capricorn
In silent fire,

COLLECTED POEMS

Noc- And all the harmonies were joined and whole,
turne Silence was music, music silence made,
Till each was both or either, and the soul
Was not afraid.

SUMMER

Now be you thankful, who in England dwell,
That to the starving trees and thirsty grass
Even at summer's height come cloudy fleets
Moist from the wastes of the Atlantic swell,
To spill their rain, and pass,
While fields renew their sweets.
Not as the Arab watches in despair
The scrannel promise of his harvest parch
Even before the sun climbs high in March
And only dust-motes dim the scorching air.
He who must yoke to wooden water-wheel
The bullock or the camel, turning slow
But constant in the round and trodden groove,
Slumberous as hypnotics move,
To the lamentation of the whining cogs,
While in the runnels rapid waters flow,
Lapped by the timid tongue of pariah dogs,
And in the trenches spread, to quench and
heal.

Or as the Persian from his hills of snow
Gathers the freshet to the jealous pool,
And floods his garden with a hundred streams
Under the plane-trees when the evening's cool,
But still for all his pains
Sees roses languish with returning noon,

COLLECTED POEMS

And in the heat of June
The leaves already flutter from the planes.

Such arid months as only exiles know,
With longing for the smell of English rains,
Some drops to lay the dust, some shower to stir
The earthy redolence of soaking loam,
Some saddening of the sky before the shower,
Some dew to hold a footprint for an hour;
When through the stones the lizard and the snake
Rustle their brittle length, and crickets chirr
Day after day, and broom-pods crackling break,
Scavenger kites hang waiting for the dead
Over the old and solitary ram,
And the mule picks his way up the dried river-
bed,—

This know, and know then how the heart can ache
With pining for the woods and clouds of home.

If I could take my England, and could wring
One living moment from her simple year,
One moment only, whether of place or time,
—One winter coppice feathery with rime,
One shred of dawn in spring,—
Then should my voice find echo in English ear;
Then might I say, "That which I love, I am".

Full summer comes; June brings the longest day.
All country dwellers know the small despair
Of the year's summit; but the yeoman now

THE LAND—SUMMER

Has little time for vain regrets to spare.
There's work enough for him and all his folks;
He watches for the flowering of his hay;
Knows that cleared land is ready for the plough;
Washes his empty sheds with cleansing lime
While herds at pasture fatten to their prime,
With fisking tails in shade beneath the oaks.

And before great harvest takes him to the field,
Imperious and urgent for his time,
If he be wise he'll finish with his flock
Shearing as early as the warmth of May
Down in the genial meadows of the Weald.
There, in a barn, with crazy doors swung wide
Making a square of sun on dusty floor,
The shearer sits, in shepherd's borrowed smock,
And from the pen of huddled backs outside,
Each beast in turn is driven through the door;
Struggles, and kicks, but with a hands-twist thrown
Lies foolish, as the fingers slick and deft
Open the fleece and cut the belly up,
(Changing left hand for right, and right for left,)
Against the fall of wool, in one sole piece,
All test of skill, all source of surly pride;
Then on the heap is pitched the greasy fleece,
And the clipped sheep,—hogg, wether, lusty tup,—
Staggers astonished from such curt release,
And bleating seeks the refuge of the heft;
Naked, and bleating, and at first forlorn

*Sheep
Shearing*

COLLECTED POEMS

Sheep With narrow smear of blood on neck or side,
Shearing From sharp experience goes the shearling shorn.

Shepherd Yet is the shepherd roughly kind;
Anoints a wound, shakes disapproving head,
But tolerant, to slight mishap resigned;
Scours the short wool for maggot, tick, or ked.
Shepherd's an old and a familiar trade;
Abel, that firstling of the sunburnt plains,
Through the scorched months between the annual
rains
Sang to his firstlings in the fig-tree's shade;
As Jacob, seven years to win a maid,
—She being beautiful, and Leah but tender-eyed,—
Drove out his flock into the stony place,
Ringstraked, speckled, pied;
Peeled the green poplar switch, and dreamed of
Rachel's face;
As David, young and ruddy, kept the sheep,
Shepherd and harp-player in the wilderness;
Shaping for kingship, growing to a throne,
Come from the wilds to soothe dark Saul to sleep.
For no man knows as he who lives alone
The vigour of a purpose deeply laid,
The strength, the fate, the seal upon his brow,
The urgency of an unpublished vow,
A vow unregistered, a vow unmade,
Unknown to its maker, rather; only known
To the God and origin of such fumbling ends,

THE LAND—SUMMER

Shepherd

So inly lived, so congruously held,
True in each gesture as by force compelled,
(For no man sees the pattern of his maze,
Least of all he who plans his careful ways
Lacking the strong inevitable thing,
As Israel, Abel, David knew,
Yet unaware to consummation grew,
The patriarch, the martyr, and the king.

No man is closer to the beasts he tends,
Nor, idle, savours such contented days;
No man more blessèd-free,
Free from our need of comfort and of friends,
Love, props, illusion, counterfeit, escape;
Living a life that to its real shape
Evolves, increases, swells its girth, ascends,
As an unconscious and a splendid tree,
A fact of Nature, not a random plan.

I remember, I met two shepherds carrying
An old man, dead, high on the summer Downs.
He was a shepherd too; I had known the man.
Foxes he knew, he knew the ways of the hawk,
The ways of the weather, but not the ways of towns.
Dead now, his white flock going before
With shaken bells across the scars of chalk,
His dog at heel of the man who propped his head.
I stopped to gaze, since I should gaze no more;
To take my last look, since here was no returning,

COLLECTED POEMS

Shepherd But could not learn from him, for there's no learning
Either from alien or familiar dead.

Sheep After the general shearing still remain
Washing The tenderer milch-yoes to be clipped.
A separate job, some later week,
When temperate days will hold,
—For eild sheep, wethers, hogs, and barren yoes
Risk with less danger the returning cold.
Then may the lambs be dipped,
The lambs that frantic for their mothers seek
Who gaunt, ungainly, queer, regain the fold.
And general dipping next in order goes,
Snatched between hay and harvest, as may be,
And as the ripening and the weather fit.
This is a feast that makes the whole farm shout
With laughter as on holiday, to see
The bothered and unwilling beasts submit
And swim the tank, and scramble dripping out
With never a maggot left, or louse, or flea.
Sheep do the work, while men stand grinning by,
Knowing that work in earnest waits them after
This interlude, this funning, and this laughter,
Work in the fields, with aching thews, and sweat,
And blessed coolth only when sun has set.

Haysel The summer's horn indeed is full with crops;
and And earlier toil its due reward has earned.
Harvest

THE LAND—SUMMER

Now shall you reap and gather, store and stack
Your hay, your corn, your barley and your hops
In close succession, being less concerned
With calendar and farmer's almanac
Than with good timely weather, setting fair
Over the parcelled fields from copse to copse;
Good summer sun, that dries the waggon track,
Ripens the grasses, tans the swollen awn,
And puts contented faces everywhere.

*Hayse
and
Harvest*

First you shall cut your hay, when grasses stand
In flower, but running not to seed,
But even here rehearse the farmer's creed:
'Tis farmer, not the date, that calls the tune;
Better dry August hay than wet in June.
Have your folks working in the fields by dawn,
Your team of horses doubly spanned;
Leave the cut swath all day; and air by rake
Next morning, and, if weather still be set,
Gather to cocks for carting, but should wet
Flatten the cocks, then you shall tedd and shake
Again when sun returns. Now you shall build
Your rick in yard or field, as suits you best,
Choosing your stacker for a good man skilled,
Building on brushwood, sides both true and straight,
That when hay settles lines may still be plumb;
And let each forkful to its place be pressed
And truly bound, by stacker's treading weight;
Widen your eaving-course; let roof be steep,

Hayse

COLLECTED POEMS

Haysel Bents sloping outwards, so to keep
Rain from the heart until the thatcher come.
Then you may leave your rick with easy mind;
Fodder for sweet-breathed cattle shall be sweet;
And whether nights be harsh or days be kind
Your hay shall neither moulder, rot, nor heat;
You shall not wake to hear your cowman shout,
As calving heifer calls him from his rest;
You shall not stare to see in fear and doubt
A blood-red feather flaming on the west,
And rousing all your people as you run,
Hasten too late towards your labour's pyre,
And see your reckoned trusses, hardly-won,
Blaze to the wanton merriment of fire.

Harvest Next shall you reap your corn. Your oats shall fall
Before full ripeness set them on to shed,
But leave your barley till it droop the head
With ripened beard. The tall
Wheat for an early cut; at midday, walk
When sun is hot and high, and if you hear
Straw crackle in the standing crop,
And see the slender forest of the stalk
Still green towards the ground, but gold at top,
Then you may know that cutting-time is near.
Peas are pernickety; cut when you may.
Beans, the sweet-scented beans of spring, shall stand
Till pods are turning black, or till you clear
Against the needs of autumn for your land.

THE LAND—SUMMER

Now as to cutting: you shall choose your day *Harvest*
When weather signs are fairest, as for hay;
Scythe first the heading round the field by hand,
Then send your reaper up the flat gold wall
With whirling sails and clash of toppling sheaves:
See that the cutter keen and sharply cleaves,
And that the horses, driven with a level gait,
Work the full width, and keep the measure straight.

And in the evening when the final square
Of standing corn fast dwindles to its end,
When the tired horses take a sharper bend,
A shorter strip each time, as day grows late,
Let boys stand round, with ready stick and stone,
To watch for the dash of rabbit or of hare
Within the last small narrowing refuge penned;
Poor frightened Wat, that all the day alone
(Since first the reaper with its whirring noise
Made terror of the field,)
Crouched to the ground, by friendly straw concealed,
Inward and inward creeping, as the voice
Of men came nearer, and the sheaves were thrown
Out on the widening stubble, there to lie
Until the stooker with his fork came by,
And horses' shaggy fetlocks trampled past
At their monotonous pacing, till at last
Through thinning stalks, pressed flat against the earth,
The fugitive saw, with starting eye,
Their shining shoes strike fire on errant flints,
And the sharp knives slip by with level glints.

COLLECTED POEMS

Harvest Then goes the lean brown body for its life,
Streaked for the distant shelter of the wood,
Across the new, strange stubble hurled,
That was not there at dawn,—a different world
Since men and horses came with cutting knife,
And razed the corn that tall and rustling stood.
But odds too heavy end the frantic race;
There's nothing but a twitching body cast
Down by a jacket, as 'twere nothing worth
But shillings to the farmer's frugal wife.

An English cornfield in full harvesting
Is English as the Bible, though no more
(These clanking times) the gleaners following
The reapers by their rhythm rapt
Plunder the gavels for their little store;
Or the sickle cut the poppies and the corn,
Save when the crop is tangled by a gale,
Beaten by rain, twisted like murdered hair:
Then comes the sickle to its old avail
Crook'd as the young moon in her narrowest horn,
And steals in the poor broken tangle, where
Straightforward knives are parried, and the apt
Inventiveness of man shall not prevail.
Then to the simplest shapes of his first craft,
—Livelihood wrested from the earth that bore,
Cradled, and confined him,—man shall repair;
Shapes copied from the sky, with cutting edge;
Natural shapes, to meet the natural hitch
Of hindering weather, the permanent enemy;

THE LAND—SUMMER

Then, with the noonscape, underneath the hedge, *Harvest*
His fingers blistered by the rubbing haft,
His shoulders propped by hedge, his feet in ditch,
The random reaper drains his pint of ale.

Look to your stooking, for full many a field
Of hearty grain and straw runs half to waste
Through heedless stooking, and the proper yield
Leaves half its measure to the rook and daw.
But if you'd have full grain and ripened straw,
After a week of drying fit to cart,
Stooker, take up a sheaf in either hand,
Between the ears and band,
And swing them clear, and bring the butts apart
Sharply to ground, ears sloping to a peak,
(Ten sheaves for Kent,) clashing together, braced,
So that the little ridge be thatched and sleek,
Firm to the wind, secure to rain and hail,
That winnower and that flail,
Those thieves of harvest, pilfering what they can
In last-hour larceny from rival man.
For nature gives, and nature takes again;
Therefore be eager of her liberal hours;
To drought succeeds the flood, to calm the gale,
And winter's frost lays low the summer's flowers.
Therefore, you harvesters, before the rain
Trample your crop with roguish feet,
Wring what you may, and if too fast and fleet
Even the summer sun describe his arc
Leaving you with your shocks but half-way set,

COLLECTED POEMS

Harvest Be prouder than the punctual rigid clerk,
And stickle not to labour after dark,
For you take nature's orders, he the clock's.
The cooler night shall spare your noonday
sweat;
The breeze shall whisper in the rustling shocks;
The moon above the thorn
Rise harvest-tawny on the stubble shorn,
And in the bending lines of girls and men
Some snatch of song be born.
Lovers shall find their magic then,
And jolly farmers wink at privilege;
Only the moon shall look behind the hedge,
Confederate of youth;
Only the moon shall hear the whispered pledge,
Great lyric liar, to a lovelier truth
Transcending, setting purport free,
And touching all things with her alchemy.

*When moonlight reigns, the meanest brick and stone
Take on a beauty not their own,
And past the flaw of builded wood
Shines the intention whole and good,
And all the little homes of man
Rise to a dimmer, nobler plan
When colour's absence gives escape
To the deeper spirit of the shape,*

*—Then earth's great architecture swells
Among her mountains and her fells*

THE LAND—SUMMER

*Under the moon to amplitude
Massive and primitive and rude,*

Harvest

*—Then do the clouds like silver flags
Stream out above the tattered crags,
And black and silver all the coast
Marshals its hunched and rocky host,
And headlands striding sombrely
Buttress the land against the sea,
The darkening land, the brightening wave,—
When moonlight slants through Merlin's cave.*

And August comes, when fields are sere and
brown,

When stubble takes the place of ruffling corn;
When the sweet grass is like a prisoner shorn;
The air is full of drifting thistledown,
Grey pointed sprites, that on the breezes ride.
The cloyed trees droop, the ash-keys spinning fall;
The brooks are pebbly; for the trickle's dried;
Birds moult, and in the leafy copses hide,
And summer makes a silence after spring,
As who with age a liberal youth should chide.

*This is the month of weeds.
Kex, charlock, thistle,
Among the shorn bristle
Of stubble drop seeds.
This is the month of weeds.*

*Weed-
monath*

COLLECTED POEMS

*Weed-
monath*

*Spurry, pimpernel, quitch,
Twine in the stubble,
Making for trouble;
With nettle in ditch,
Spurry, pimpernel, quitch.*

*Yet the field has a friend,
The nimble clover,
Custodian, lover,
Yare to defend.
The field has a friend.*

*Humble-bees boldly reach
Red clover's honey,
Paid in sweet money.
Hive-bees in vain beseech:
Honey is out of reach.*

*Now let the clover spread;
Nature it craveth;
Foemen it braveth,
Strangling them dead.
So let the clover spread.*

Summer Now pasture's low; the moidered cattle-men
Drive their poor stock by unaccustomed paths
To forage on the richer aftermaths,
Old hay-fields, billowy with dip and stetch.
Now by the hedgerows and along the lane

THE LAND—SUMMER

Summer

The berried cuckoo-pint and yellow vetch
Herald the autumn, and the squirrels rob
Windfalls of hazel and the Kentish cob,
(Plumping their kernels white as children's teeth,)
With acorns, provender for the winter drey,
That little larder, safely tucked beneath
Leaves, roots, old tree-stumps, for a milder day
Of winter, when the sleeping muscles stretch
And there's a stirring in the sodden wood
As woken squirrel reaches after food.

Man's not the only harvester; urchins and voles
Lay up their store of berries and of grain
Preciously gleaned and carried to their holes
With busy trotting paws and serious snout,
Each to his schemes no less than man devout,
Making of instinct all-sufficient reasons;
Intent on waking with the spring again
To life's new provocation, as if seasons
Eternally renewed were dedicate
To hedge-hogs, squirrels, badgers, men, mice, moles.

But though such hints of autumn gild the late
Summer, still is the summer fully here,
Great-breasted, brazen, strumpet of the year;
Furiously I do the summer hate,
Resentfully I do the summer love,
The woods all amorous with croodling dove,
Days weakening to the soul, days threatening
Winter-bought strength, thin purity of spring.

COLLECTED POEMS

Summer With summer's laxness am I all undone.
What can I do in summer? What but sing:

*Far from shrewd companies,
Far from the flares,
Here where the summer is,
And laden airs,
Here where no noise of men
Down in the wood
Startles the water-hen
And small black brood,
Here where the branches wave
And day is green,
Making the wood a cave
Aquamarine,
Here where the insects hum,
And dragon-fly,
Here we clandestine come,
Marvell and I.*

*In summer when the woods are deep,
Ghostly society I keep,
And play the spy, down dappled glades,
On lovely or on ardent shades,
Eavesdropper on the gallant game
Where nothing's burnt by so much flame,
And nothing broken but the rhyme
From maying-time to haying-time.
And what's the matter, though I see
A wrongly amorous company?*

THE LAND—SUMMER

Summer

*Though lover after lover flit
Labelled with names that do not fit?
If Lovelace Sacharissa woo,
Or Waller Julia pursue,
If Marvell do Lucasta find
Than his own mistress less unkind,
Or Herrick's persuasions prove
A better argument of love
Than the conversion of the Jew?*

*The cuckoo stutters in his note,
But still the turbulent petticoat
Of cherry silk or oyster grey
Makes lively sport through summer day.
The rounded arm, the bunchèd curl,
The peeping shoe, the sullen pearl,—
Between the trees they glance and pass,
Or take their ease upon the grass.*

*Perilla, fly! Corinna, stay!
In deserts of Bohemia,
A wood near Athens, or this wood
Where these grown oaks as saplings stood
Three hundred English years gone by,
"And yet I love her till I die".*

So, for the idle, float the lither days,
The seremonth deepens as its age draws on;
Morning and evening veil them in a haze;

COLLECTED POEMS

Summer But when the last high loaded cart has gone
Leaving its trail of straws along the hedge,
And the last mug is drained to harvest-pledge,
Work still remains to finish what is done.

Thatcher Thatcher with carpet bound about his knees
Tramps farm to farm with slow deliberate stride.
Thatchers are rare, these days, he'd have you know,
Good thatchers, those that go
About their business as it were a pride,
Scorning Dutch barns and mushrooms such as these,
New-fangled, driving out a settled trade.
Once there were thatchers, ah, could hip a roof
Easy as twist a sheaf; were not afraid
Of any rain, since work was weather-proof.
East Anglia bred them, where the reeds grow grey
Mile upon fenny mile, and ducks go home
Over the level wastes of dyke and sluice.
Still maundering on, he sorts his pegs, his comb,
His wooden bat, his twine, in neat array,
Trimming his straw, — full length of wheaten
straw,—
Watered and sweated ready to its use,
Sweet in the yelm, for thatch without a flaw.
Grumbling and boasting turn and turn about,
Having told the tally of the needed threaves,
He mounts his ladder, pocket full of splines,
And packs his yelms, and calls his mate a lout
If he disturb one straw from ordered lines.

THE LAND—SUMMER

Proud of his stelch, and prouder of his eaves,
Proud of his skill to thatch an awkward pent,
He is an artist with a long descent,
Brother to workers in peculiar crafts;
To the old wheel-wright, punctual timber-master,
—Could tell you whether wood were frow or doted
Before the trunk was opened; often quoted
The Bible; could turn out a pair of shafts
With straight and proper grain; adzed every spoke
By hand, and never had one cracked or bent;—
Brother to pargetter, with hair and plaster,
Combing the diaper on porous lime,
Pleased as a child with patterns he'd invent;
Brother to all the slow fastidious folk
Whose care is matched by their disdain of time;
To basket-makers, shaping Kentish hedges;
To osier-weavers, twisting supple wands;
To Jack-of-all-trades with his sundry dodges;
Brick-layer, even, carrying his hod;
To Down-bred shepherds, puddling secret ponds,
So jealous of their mystery, for dew;
Lastly, to dowser, forcing virgin wells,
That changeling of the willows, simple, odd,
Touched by some finger laid on him askew
At birth by nixie or by water-god;
But dowser never knows, or never tells.
Smiling, the willow upright in his hold,
Vacant he lags across the thirsty miles;
Shall water pull him? or shall buried gold,
Panoply of a Dane, beneath a mound?

*Crafts-
men*

COLLECTED POEMS

Crafts- But dowsers never knew, or never told.
men Only, he pauses when he feels the switch
Quicken between his fingers, curtesy, twitch;
Pauses, and points, and smiles,
And loses interest; for water's found.

All craftsmen share a knowledge. They have held
Reality down fluttering to a bench;
Cut wood to their own purposes; compelled
The growth of pattern with the patient shuttle;
Drained acres to a trench.
Control is theirs. They have ignored the subtle
Release of spirit from the jail of shape.
They have been concerned with prison, not escape;
Pinioned the fact, and let the rest go free,
And out of need made inadvertent art.
All things designed to play a faithful part
Build up their plain particular poetry.
Tools have their own integrity;
The sneath of scythe curves rightly to the hand,
The hammer knows its balance, knife its edge,
All tools inevitably planned,
Stout friends, with pledge
Of service; with their crotchets too
That masters understand,
And proper character, and separate heart,
But always to their chosen temper true.
—So language, smithied at the common fire,
Grew to its use; as sneath and shank and haft

THE LAND—SUMMER

Of well-grained wood, nice instruments of craft,
Curve to the simple mould the hands require,
Born of the needs of man.

*Crafts-
men*

The poet like the artisan
Works lonely with his tools; picks up each one,
Blunt mallet knowing, and the quick thin blade,
And plane that travels when the hewing's done;
Rejects, and chooses; scores a fresh faint line;
Sharpens, intent upon his chiselling;
Bends lower to examine his design,
If it be truly made,
And brings perfection to so slight a thing.
But in the shadows of his working-place,
Dust-moted, dim,
Among the chips and lumber of his trade,
Lifts never his bowed head, a breathing-space
To look upon the world beyond the sill,
The world framed small, in distance, for to him
The world and all its weight are in his will.
Yet in the ecstasy of his rapt mood
There's no retreat his spirit cannot fill,
No distant leagues, no present, and no past,
No essence that his need may not distil,
All pressed into his service, but he knows
Only the immediate care, if that be good;
The little focus that his words enclose;
As the poor joiner, working at his wood,
Knew not the tree from which the planks were taken,
Knew not the glade from which the trunk was
brought,

COLLECTED POEMS

Crafts- Knew not the soil in which the roots were fast,
men Nor by what centuries of gales the boughs were
shaken,
But holds them all beneath his hands at last.

Much goes to little making,—law and skill,
Tradition's usage, each man's separate gift;
Till the slow worker sees that he has wrought
More than he knew of builded truth,
As one who slips through years of youth,
Leaving his young indignant rage,
And finds the years' insensible drift
Brings him achievement with the truce of age.

AUTUMN

How slow the darkness comes, once daylight's gone, *Angelus*
A slowness natural after English day,
So unimpassioned, tardy to move on,
No southern violence that burns away,
Ardent to live, and eager to be done.
The twilight lingers, etching tree on sky;
The gap's a portal on the ridge's crest;
The partridge coveys call beyond the rye;
Still some red bar of sunset cracks the west;
The orange harvest-moon like a dull sun
Rolls silent up the east above the hill;
Earth like a sleeper breathes, and all is still
This hour of after-day, the dying day's bequest,
This autumn dusk, when neither day nor night
Urges a man to strive or sleep; he stands
Filled with the calm of that familiar place,
Idle the shaft beneath his folded hands,
He who must work the lowlands of his farm,
Making tenacity his only creed,
Taking of death and birth his daily need,
Viewing mortality without alarm.

But brief, but short, this hour of quietude
Gives pause to labour; but a breathing-space

Autumn

COLLECTED POEMS

Autumn Granted, before necessity renewed
Twists up the sinews of his fortitude;

For now the year draws on towards its ending.
Squirrel has hoarded all his nuts, and man,
(Laying for yet another spring his plan,)
Counts over what he has for winter's spending.
Granary's full with heaped and dusty store:
Apples on attic floor
Throughout the house their brackish smell are
 sending;
The steepled ricks with frost are hoar
In silent yard; the harvest's at its sleeping;
That's slumber now, which once was heyday
 reaping.
Now retrospect and prospect have their share,
For autumn like the Janus of the year
Holds spring to spring in double-handed keeping.
That sleeps, which once was live; but in the
 womb
Newly conceived, as corn within the ear,
Another sowing ripens to its bloom.
Further you may not know, but only this:
Nature's an enemy who calls no armistice.
Mistrust the seeming truce, that in the pyre
Of distant woods, and in the gardens' fire,
In pheasants running bronze on furrowed mould,
Burnishes autumn with a coat of gold.
Therefore towards the stubble turn your plough;
Cut gashes new across the healing earth;

THE LAND—AUTUMN

Spare not your servant, since to man austere
No respite comes, but bend beneath your vow
Reluctant fields, and bring new life to birth.

Autumn

Homer and Hesiod and Virgil knew
The ploughshare in its reasonable shape,
Classical from the moment it was new,
Sprung ready-armed, ordained without escape,
And never bettered though man's cunning grew,
And barbarous countries joined the classic reach:
Coulter and singletree and share and haft
Frugal of ornament as peasants' speech,
Strong to their use and simple as their craft,
Whether to turn the ridge or cleave the rean.
And as the slow Egyptian turns the dark
Loam in his narrow valley where the green
Draws the rich record of the river's mark,
Or as the Mede across his Asian plain,
Watched by the circling mountains topped with
snow,

*Plough-
ing*

Scores the poor furrow for his meagre wheat
With wooden yoke and lurching buffalo
Pricked by the lazy goad,
And leaves his sowing to the care of God
And takes the southern road
To summer pastures, where the waters flow,
Driving his train of ponies roughly shod
And camels with grave bells, that surly go
Where immemorial caravans have trod,

COLLECTED POEMS

Plough- Marking the trackway with their whitened bones,
ing His four-span waggons with their homely load,
Black curly lambs that scramble on the stones,
Startling the cricket and the crested lark,
And after summer northward moves again
To reap his harvest in the wickering heat,—
So set your English share, that as a lover tills
The breaking field, and let the blade be keen;
Brace up your hames that collars may not irk,
And urge your horses to the guiding drills,
But knot your hempen reins, and only yerk
Your team by voice, for they must strain
Against a fitful soil, and nobler work
Spared the impatient checking of the rein.
Ploughing's begun among the gentle hills;
Wide skies where cloudy cities travel white,
Canopy little acres; in the blanched serene
Tent of the heaven wheel the untidy rooks,
And settle, gawky, on the browning tracks,
While man and horse pursue their ancient rite.

Thresh- Carted away are all the leaning stooks,
ing And from the stackyard comes the thrasher's purr.
England's a humming hive till threshing's done
And chaff-motes blowing from the emptied sacks
Mellow the barn in beams of dusty sun.
Threshing's a game which sets the farm astir
On fine October mornings when the mist
Melts to reveal between the steaming stacks

THE LAND—AUTUMN

The thresher lumbering slowly up the lane.
The gang swarms out in jolly morning vein;
Unricker, leather strap about his wrist,
Sackman, and stacker, and the loutish hands,
And dairymaid, agreeable to be kissed,
And farmer's wife, come out to see the fun
After a week of baking loaf and pie,
Admires the young men with a roguish eye;
And barn-door hens that pick among the grain
And terrier nosing round for rats, and bands
Of children, rather shy.
Straw, chaff, and grain, once work's begun,
Clean winnowed, sorted fine,
Heap in appointed place, all rising swift,
And prudent farmer measures out his thrift,
And takes his sacks, and thankful sets them by,
Each fat and solid as a new-killed swine,
Till they may fill his boarded granary.

*Thresh-
ing*

And other cares in autumn fill the days,
The care of gardens and of roadside ways.
The weazen hedger with his hook and stick,
Brown as a root himself, and stoutly gloved,
Brishes the hedges, shaving countryside
Like a cropped schoolboy; brambles, and the
 loved
Dog-rose, with hazel-shoots and thorny quick
Shrivel to bonfire heaps along the waste
From Michaelmas to Hallowtide

*Hedging
and
Ditching*

COLLECTED POEMS

Hedging That hedges be more closely interlaced
and Without a gap or flaw
Ditching Next spring in chequered England, growing thick
Against young stock or colts, for mark the law:
If cattle stray and browse on neighbours' ground,
You may go seek them in the common pound.

Gardener And gardener, let your spud be sharp to ridge
The loam from spiny hedge to hedge;
Labour within your garden square
Till back be broke and light grow rare,
But never heed the sinews' pain
If you may snatch before the rain
Crisp days when clods will turn up rough;
Gentleman robin brown as snuff
With spindle legs and bright round eye
Shall be your autumn company.
Trench deep; dig in the rotting weeds;
Slash down the thistle's greybeard seeds;
Then make the frost your servant; make
His million fingers pry and break
The clods by glittering midnight stealth
Into the necessary tilth.
Then may you shoulder spade and hoe,
And heavy-booted homeward go,
For no new flowers shall be born
Save hellebore on Christmas morn,
And bare gold jasmine on the wall,
And violets, and soon the small

THE LAND—AUTUMN

Blue netted iris, like a cry
Startling the sloth of February.

Gardener

And what of the woodman and his livelihood?
Once in ten years the woodman with his axe
Felling slim undergrowth from stubby boles,
Shall bare the auburn flooring of the copse,
Its ridges, and the sandy rabbit-holes.
Then shall he pare the twigs, and set in stacks
His tall young ash and stripling chestnut poles
That presently shall serve the wreathing hops,
And he shall peel the bark of shorter wood
Clean as a cat in pattens, smelling good,
And sharpen to a point for stakes and spiles,
The whittled slivers flying as he chops,
And lash the shaven wood in ready piles.

*Wood-
craft*

But in late autumn with his ropes and guys
He'll go along the peaty forest-tracks
To seek the nobler prize
Blazed with the timber-master's scarlet mark.
Oak will he fell in spring, to gain the bark,
But ash and elm in winter, and the beech
In the short daylight of November thrown,
By Christmas shall lie open, fair to bleach,
As white and hard as bone.
The smoke coils blue above the little camp;
There, in the clearing at the fourfold went,
On mould of leaves forgotten, reeking, damp

COLLECTED POEMS

Wood- And heavy with autumnal redolence,
craft Leviathan lies prone.
Bare as the royal antlers of a stag,
His branches fork, and strive to scorn the ground,
Being born for heaven and for heaven crowned,
But man to dust and trees to timber fall,
And comes the hearse or comes the timber-wain
With nut-brown team, patient to stand or haul,
And like a naked savage bound in chain,
With limbs once proud that now through ordure
drag,
A captive moves upon his way in thrall;
And that live spirit that once lit the tree,
Fled as a bird when first the ruin came,
Sees only death, defeat, and consequent shame,
Great dignity become a husk; as we
Looking upon the dead demand in vain
Some future use for such mortality;
But being as gods to fallen trees, we know
The lowly uses not within their ken,
Re-fashioning their form to live again,
A humble phoenix stripped of memory.

Their past is sure,
Those woods deep-rooted in the swirl of time,
Temples of myth and piety and fear,
Lovely, obscure;
Dark was the ilex in the Grecian vales,
Crooked the olive, murmurous the lime.
No woodsman but had heard the Dryad cry,

THE LAND—AUTUMN

No girl but knew the goat-foot faun was nigh,
And saw the satyr through the branches leer,
And fled from those too-peopled solitudes
Into the open fields of maize and rye.
And women still have memories of woods,
Older than any personal memories;
Writhen, primeval roots, though heads be fair,
Like trees that fan the air with delicacies,
With leaves and birds among the upper air,
High, lifted canopies,
Green and black fingers of the trees, dividing
And reaching out towards an otherwhere,
Threaded with birds and birds' sweet sudden gliding,
Pattern and jargoning of tree-tops, such a world
Tangled and resonant and earth-deriding,
Now with the rain-drops' rounded globes bepearled,
And little sullen moons of mistletoe,
Now fretted with the sun, when foxes play
At fables on the dun and foxlike ground
Between the tree-trunks, and the squirrels go
Scuttering with a beechnut newly found,
To vex the pigeon and to scare the jay.

*Wood-
craft*

Of such a tall and airy world are they,
Women and woods, with shadowed aisles profound
That none explore.
—Birches, frail whispering company, are these?
Or lovely women rooted into trees?
Daughters of Norsemen, on a foreign shore
Left hostage, while the galley draws away,

COLLECTED POEMS

*Wood-
craft* Beating its rise and fall on manifold oar,
Beating a pathway to the broken coasts,
Forgetful of its ghosts?

There is a kinship: down the open ride
She strays, eternal nymph, and glances swift
Into the ambushed depths on either side;
Now fears the shadows, now the rift,
Now fears the silence, now the rustling leaf
That like a footfall with a nearing stride
Startles the stronghold of her unbelief.
Woods are her enemies, yet once she went
Fleeing before a god, and, all but spent,
Slipped from his arms, herself become a tree.
She has forgotten; wood's an enemy;
She has no knowledge of the woodland tracks,
Only a knowledge of her jeopardy,
And with lost steps, neglectful of her pride,
Stumbles towards the music of the axe.
There, brown old sylvan god, the woodsman plies
His craft and drives his wedge,
Spitting to ease the rub of tool on hands,
And she arrested at the clearing's edge
Awakened stands,
With panic terror fading from her eyes.

Autumn Now I have told the year from dawn to dusk,
Its morning and its evening and its noon;
Once round the sun our slanting orbit rolled,

THE LAND—AUTUMN

Four times the seasons changed, thirteen the moon; *Autumn*
Corn grew from seed to husk,
The young spring grass to fodder for the herds;
Drought came, and earth was grateful for the rain;
The bees streamed in and out the summer hives;
Birds wildly sang; were silent; birds
With summer's passing fitfully sang again;
The loaded waggon crossed the field; the sea
Spread her great generous pasture as a robe
Whereon the slow ships, circling statelily,
Are patterned round the globe.
The ample busyness of life went by,
All the full busyness of lives
Unknown to fame, made lovely by no words:
The shepherd lonely in the winter fold;
The tiller following the eternal plough
Beneath a stormy or a gentle sky;
The sower with his gesture like a gift
Walking the furrowed hill from base to brow;
The reaper in the piety of thrift
Binding the sheaf against his slanted thigh.

And lastly,—since it was of Kent I told,
Kent, and the parcels of her acreage,—
Peculiar autumn crops
Leave one thing more to tell,
Spilt from the horn of plenty to my page,
Spicing my line with tart or resinous smell.
Apples and hops made Kent's clean autumn wine,

Orchards

COLLECTED POEMS

Orchards Orchard and garden, loaded, looped with swags,
Scarlet and green, on bough and bine;
Heavy as apples, say we, light as hops,
Where the leafy awning sags,
And weighted boughs are crutched on forkèd props.

I told in spring of the orchard's enemies,
Wrapped in cocoon or pert upon the wing,
And of the care that prudent growers bring,
But now the swoln fulfilment of the trees,
Coloured and round,
Demands another order: nimble boys,
Reared ladders, bushel baskets on the ground,
And pick, pick, pick, while days are calm and fine.
These orchards that have lonely stood since spring,
Swelling their fruit unnoted in the sun,
Are populous suddenly, with ringing voice,
September mornings, when the sun's yet low,
And dew upon the leas
Makes brambles glisten and the mushrooms grow.
Codlin's already stripped; his day was done
When August holidays were first begun,
Being the children's apple, earliest ripe
And nothing worth for keeping; only worth
Young teeth, and summer fun.
But quarrendens, and russets nicely browned,
And common Councillors, of varied stripe,
And pippins smelling of the rainy earth
Wait to be harvested
With Peasgood Nonesuch, giant in his girth,

THE LAND—AUTUMN

Cox, Blenheim, Ribstone, properly renowned,
Apples that wait for Christmas, darkly stored
On shelf or floor, not touching, one by one.
But by the red cheek never be misled;
For virtue, flavour, seek the acid green,
Of looks less kindly, but of sharp reward
Like stringent wit that keeps a matter keen.

Orchards

Full carts, full baskets, in the misty sun.
And cider claims the windfall on the sward.

*I saw within the wheelwright's shed
The big round cartwheels, blue and red;
A plough with blunted share;
A blue tin jug; a broken chair;
And paint in trial patchwork square
Slapped up against the wall;
The lumber of the wheelwright's trade,
And tools on benches neatly laid,
The brace, the adze, the awl;*

*Making
Cider*

*And, framed within the latticed panes,
Above the cluttered sill,
Saw rooks upon the stubble hill
Seeking forgotten grains;*

*And all the air was sweet and shrill
With juice of apples heaped in skips,
Fermenting, rotten, soft with bruise,*

COLLECTED POEMS

*Making
Cider*

*And all the yard was strewn with pips,
Discarded pulp, and wrung-out ooze
That ducks with rummaging flat bill
Searched through beside the cider-press
To gobble in their greediness.*

*The young men strained upon the crank
To wring the last reluctant inch.
They laughed together, fair and frank,
And threw their loins across the winch.
A holiday from field and dung,
From plough and harrow, scythe and spade,
To dabble in another trade,
To crush the pippins in the slats,
And see that in the little vats
An extra pint was wrung;
While round about the worthies stood,
Profuse in comment, praise or blame,
Content the press should be of wood,
Advising rum, decrying wheat,
And black strong sugar makes it sweet,
But still resolved, with maundering tongue,
That cider could not be the same
As once when they were young;
But still the young contemptuous men
Laughed kindly at their old conceit,
And strained upon the crank again.*

*Now barrels ranged in portly line
Mature through winter's sleep,*

THE LAND—AUTUMN

*Aping the leisured sloth of wine
That dreams by Tiber or by Rhine,
Mellowing slow and deep;
But keen and cold the northern nights
Sharpen the quiet yard,
And sharp like no rich southern wine
The tang of cider bites;
For here the splintered stars and hard
Hold England in a frosty guard,
Orion and the Pleiades
Above the wheelwright's shed,
And Sirius resting on the trees
While all the village snores abed.*

*Making
Cider*

Hops ripen to their picking. Down the rows
Of pickers by their tally-baskets bent,
The gaitered master goes,
Slapping his leggings with a hazel switch,
Nodding good-day to folk he knows,
From London slums poured yearly into Kent,
Waking the province with their cockney slang,
And feathered hats, and fear of showers;
Down leafy tunnels, dappled by the sun,
Down sea-green aisles, where loam is brown and rich
Between the hills, and overhead the flowers
In pale imponderable clusters hang,
He loiters, followed by his spaniel bitch
Close in to heel, sulky for lack of gun.
Passed from his keeping now, those bines

*Hop
Garden*

COLLECTED POEMS

Hop That since their earliest shooting had his care;
Garden Already severed, half the lines
Are fallen withered, and the poles are bare,
But in the tallies rise the soft green heaps,
High, and are emptied, once again to fill,
For carts between the garden and the kiln
Slow but unceasing ply,
And down the trampled lane come for a fresh supply.

Oast Dusk sends the pickers home to camp,
But the country works while London sleeps.
Within the oast the sulphurous furnace roars;
Men shovel coal, and clang the doors,
And in an inner room play cards and dice
Beneath a smoking lamp;
Swear; spit; and grumble at the crop, the price,
The master's profit and the labourer's wage
With a fictitious indignation; rage
Born of sound understanding, sprung
Like lovers' quarrels from a prickly tongue,
Vain of its independence and its wit,
With hearts belying speech,
Each against foreigner defending each,
But bitter among friends,—unspoken laws.
Comes here the master: silence falls.
Shadows of men on whitewashed walls
Throw dice; deal cards; turn down the lamp; puff
smoke;
Rise up; and on a sudden redly lit

THE LAND—AUTUMN

Oast

Pass to the kiln like demons; fiercely stoke;
And to the inner room return to swear and spit,
To gamble and to grumble, spit and swear.
But he, the master, climbs the ladder-stair
To the upper loft, where silence and pale peace
Hold volatile lease;
The upper loft, where mountains on the floor
Of sapless flowers, sap-robbed flowers, swell
Bulky and weightless, ashen as fair hair
Beneath a lamp, ashen as moonlit corn,
As stubble newly shorn,
Hops dried and ready for the rhythmic press
Crushing their levity to a nothingness
Of prosy tonnage scribbled on a slate,
—Those airy mountains packed in terms of weight;—
The press that whirls its shadow on the bare
White wall and raftered ceiling, wheel and spoke
Distorted, laying like a heavier cloak
New burdens of resin on the loaded air.

Now the old drier shuffles across the loft,
Opens the oast-house door,
Where hops spread drying, sappy, green, and soft,
Wreathed with the mounting of the faint blue smoke
In a round chamber with a pointed roof,
And the scent overpowers.
Knee-deep he slouches, kicking up the flowers;
Like an old priest at some clandestine rite
Round the white walls, he, dressed in white,
Stealthily travels, ancient and aloof.

COLLECTED POEMS

Oast Ancient as man on earth, man turns to wine
Or bread earth's produce; seeks escape or need;
Release, necessity, the alternating creed;
Necessity, release; food, anodyne.
So the old drier, forty or fifty years,
Kicks up the hops, that they be evenly dried
Each autumn as the harvest comes again,
Grown old at a lonely task; he hears
The sound of voices in the yard outside,
The clang of furnace doors, the tread of men;
And they, as they swing homeward down the lane,
Look back at the oast and the single lighted pane
Like a square beacon yellow in the night,
And know that the drier slouches round the wall.

Vintage Yet I recall

Another harvest, not beneath this sky
So Saxon-fair, so washed by dews and rain;
Another harvest, where the gods still rouse,
And stretch, and waken with the evenfall.
Down from the hill the slow white oxen crawl,
Dragging the purple waggon heaped with must,
Raising on sundered hoofs small puffs of dust,
With scarlet tassels on their milky brows,
Gentle as evening moths. Beneath the yoke
Lounging against the shaft they fitful strain
To draw the waggon on its creaking spoke,
And all the vineyard folk
With staves and shouldered tools surround the wain.

THE LAND—AUTUMN

Vintage

The wooden shovels take the purple stain,
The dusk is heavy with the wine's warm load;
Here the long sense of classic measure cures
The spirit weary of its difficult pain;
Here the old Bacchic piety endures,
Here the sweet legends of the world remain.
Homeric waggons lumbering the road;
Virgilian litanies among the bine;
Pastoral sloth of flocks beneath the pine;
The swineherd watching, propped upon his
 goad,
Under the chestnut trees the rootling swine.
Who could so stand, and see this evening fall,
This calm of husbandry, this redolent tilth,
This terracing of hills, this vintage wealth,
Without the pagan sanity of blood
Mounting his veins in young and tempered health?
Who could so stand, and watch processional
The vintners, herds, and flocks in dusty train
Wend through the molten evening to regain
The terraced farm and trodden threshing-floor
Where late the flail
Tossed high the maize in scud of gritty ore,
And lies half-buried in the heap of grain,—
Who could so watch, and not forget the rack
Of wills worn thin and thought become too frail,
Nor roll the centuries back
And feel the sinews of his soul grow hale,
And know himself for Rome's inheritor?

COLLECTED POEMS

O Mantuan! that sang the bees and vines,
The tillage and the flocks,
I saw the round moon rise above the pines,
One quiet planet prick the greening west,
As goats came leaping up the stony crest
And the crook'd goatherd moved between the rocks.
That moon, that star, above my English weald,
Hung at that hour, and I not there to see;
Shining through mist above the dew-drenched field,
Making a cavern of the plummy tree.
Then all my deep acquaintance with that land,
Crying for words, welled up; as man who knows
That Nature, tender enemy, harsh friend,
Takes from him soon the little that she gave,
Yet for his span will labour to defend
His courage, that his soul be not a slave,
Whether on waxen tablet or on loam,
Whether with stylus or with share and heft
The record of his passage he engrave,
And still, in toil, takes heart to love the rose.

Then thought I, Virgil! how from Mantua reft,
Shy as a peasant in the courts of Rome,
You took the waxen tablets in your hand,
And out of anger cut calm tales of home.

ISFAHAN, *April* 1926

IN ENGLAND

SISSINGHURST

Thursday. To V. W.

A TIRED swimmer in the waves of time
I throw my hands up: let the surface close:
Sink down through centuries to another clime,
And buried find the castle and the rose.
 Buried in time and sleep,
 So drowsy, overgrown,
That here the moss is green upon the stone,
 And lichen stains the keep.
I've sunk into an image, water-drowned,
Where stirs no wind and penetrates no sound,
Illusive, fragile to a touch, remote,
Foundered within the well of years as deep
As in the waters of a stagnant moat.
Yet in and out of these decaying halls
I move, and not a ripple, not a quiver,
Shakes the reflection though the waters shiver,—
My tread is to the same illusion bound.
Here, tall and damask as a summer flower,
Rise the brick gable and the spring tower;
 Invading Nature crawls
With ivied fingers over rosy walls,
 Searching the crevices,
Clasping the mullion, riveting the crack,

COLLECTED POEMS

Binding the fabric crumbling to attack,
And questing feelers of the wandering fronds
 Grove for interstices,
Holding this myth together under-seas,
 Anachronistic vagabonds!

And here, by birthright far from present fashion,
As no disturber of the mirrored trance
I move, and to the world above the waters
 Wave my incognisance.

For here, where days and years have lost their
 number,
I let a plummet down in lieu of date,
And lose myself within a slumber
 Submerged, elate.

For now the apple ripens, now the hop,
And now the clover, now the barley-crop;
Spokes bound upon a wheel forever turning,
Wherewith I turn, no present manner learning;
Cry neither "Speed your processes!" nor "Stop!"
I am content to leave the world awry
(Busy with politic perplexity,)
If still the cart-horse at the fall of day
Clumps up the lane to stable and to hay,
And tired men go home from the immense
 Labour and life's expense
That force the harsh recalcitrant waste to yield
Corn and not nettles in the harvest-field;

SISSINGHURST

This husbandry, this castle, and this I
 Moving within the deeps,
Shall be content within our timeless spell,
Assembled fragments of an age gone by,
While still the sower sows, the reaper reaps,
Beneath the snowy mountains of the sky,
And meadows dimple to the village bell.
So plods the stallion up my evening lane
And fills me with a mindless deep repose,
 Wherein I find in chain
The castle, and the pasture, and the rose.

Beauty, and use, and beauty once again
Link up my scattered heart, and shape a scheme
Commensurate with a frustrated dream.

The autumn bonfire smokes across the woods
And reddens in the water of the moat;
As red within the water burns the scythe,
And the moon dwindled to her gibbous tithe
 Follows the sunken sun afloat.

Green is the eastern sky and red the west;
The hop-kilns huddle under pallid hoods;
The waggon stupid stands with upright shaft,
As daily life accepts the night's arrest.
Night like a deeper sea engulfs the land,
The castle, and the meadows, and the farm;
Only the baying watch-dog looks for harm,
And shakes his chain towards the lunar brand.
In the high room where tall the shadows tilt

COLLECTED POEMS

As candle-flames blow crooked in the draught,
The reddened sunset on the panes was spilt,
But now as black as any nomad's tent
The night-time and the night of time have blent
Their darkness, and the waters doubly sleep.
Over my head the years and centuries sweep,
 The years of childhood flown,
 The centuries unknown;
I dream; I do not weep.

1930

*THE BULL

Now sinks another day to rest
On summer and her leafy ways.
By the last golden light caressed
The farmstead drowns in the haze
Of slanting light in rungs and reins
From heaven slung across the Weald
Above the pricking of the vanes,
More golden than the ripening field
Within the hedgerow squares ensealed.

The owl with short and silent stroke
Deadly to field-fare or to mouse,
Slants from the apple to the oak
Across the orchard near the house;
And through the grasses creep the small
Creatures of twilight, hid by day;
The snail beside the garden wall,
The mole on his myopic way.

The kindly trees protective stand
Around the farm less old than they,
And drawl their shadows on a land
Tilled by a man's forgotten hand,
But still beneath his grandson's sway;
And silent as an empty fane

COLLECTED POEMS

The barn with doors flung wide
Drinks in the rays of golden rain
On ropes and pulleys, sacks of grain,
A summer evening's pride.

The vanes upon the oasts outside
Have turned their chimneys to the east,
And dim within the shadows deep
Where velvet silence shrouds the roof,
The barn is darkened and asleep.
But in the stall the monstrous beast
Ranges, and stamps a fretful hoof.

The granaries once more are full,
—Oh sweet monotony of the year!—
But in the stall the aging bull
Feels that the end of time is near;
End of that time which was his span,
When he could lash his tail, or browse
On acres all his own,
Or stand four-square and lordly scan
His grass, his calves, his willing cows,
Male, arrogant, alone.
No bachelor! the lord and sire
Of cows and calves in half a shire,
Sole sovereign of his clan;

Whom no man dared approach but he
Who brought the bucket filled with milk,
When little bulls are weak of knee

THE BULL

And muzzled sleek as silk;
Days when within a neighbouring byre
His mother softly mourned her loss,
But he already scampered free
In right and callow disregard,
And kicked his heels, and tried to toss
The empty bucket round the yard.

Days of a lost and youthful spring
Before his liberty was scarred
And branded by the shameful ring;
But what's a ring, when thews are hard
And sex supreme in strength and youth?
A small and negligible thing!

But now resigned within the shed
He moves uneasy round the stall,
And lowers his great tufted head
Against the manger and the wall;
Too patient now for mighty rage,
Too mild and cumbrous and uncouth,
He watches night creep on like age,
And only dimly knows the truth.

The night creeps on; the single star
Of contemplation's lidless eye
Stares through the stable door ajar,
Constant, dispassionate, and high;
Returning at the punctual hour
To stare on man and beast alike,

COLLECTED POEMS

On rising strength or fallen power,
Nor merciless, nor pitiful,
Without compassion or dislike;
And sees the old and lonely bull
Who does not know that he must die.

Aug. 1932

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* WOOD-CUT

For Benedict

WHEN droning summer earth had slewed the shadows
Around the stable pivot of the sun,
Languid and lengthening across the meadows
The morn and eve in measure were as one.

Then sleepy rolled the earth to general slumber,
Shadowed yet shadowless within the dusk,
But still the sun-burnt hay-fields kept their umber,
And still the corn-fields ripened in the husk,

While the young moon unsheathed her curving sabre
In the rinsed heaven of the greenish west,
And men maintained their sempiternal labour,
Taking no rest though earth herself took rest.

And while the last green light in heaven tarried
Behind the moving figures cut in black,
The last great loads of hay were safely carried
And heaped upon the shoulders of the stack.

Beyond the oasts, beyond the pricking gable,
Beyond the respite of the sleeping farm,
Beyond the stamping hoofs in cobbled stable,
Man stretched out day upon his tired arm;

COLLECTED POEMS

Small man, but now in outline grown titanic
Heaving the trusses as the rick rose high;
The prongs of forks in silhouette satanic,
And rungs of ladders reared against the sky.

July 1931

7

*OUT WITH A GUN

. . . BUT who would loose a gun to-night?
The day in silver stillness ends,
And on the lake such peace descends
That swallows in their evening flight
Make music on a level wing.

The trees reflected in the lake
Plunge down to depths that meet the sky;
The water rests without a sigh,
Though little moorhens leave their wake,
And insects drop a widening ring.

Confident in this hour emerge
The secret lives from brake and hole,
The coot, the leveret, and the vole,
Tranquil to move about the verge
Between the water and the wood.

Christ! has the world not pain enough
That I should shatter with a shot
—As one who crept with conscious plot,
Evil, malevolent, and rough,—
This innocence of lowlihood?

Two swallows nest within my house;
I wake at dawn to see them come;

COLLECTED POEMS

And on my floor let fall the crumb
Of harvest for a duffle mouse
Who makes my room his private garth.

Squirrel, take half my nuts; and you,
Soft leveret, share my springing corn;
Vixen, deride the hunting-horn;
Fear but the owl, small pointed shrew;
And, sweet Saint Francis, haunt my hearth.

1932

*TO ANY M.F.H.

SANCTUARY should exist on earth;
Some private place, where life may be.
Some private place for death and birth,
For boisterous love and puppy mirth
Between the bracken and the tree.

In such a place, a girdled place,
The refuge of the small pursued,
Shall some similitude of grace
Be caught within the fenced embrace
That guards my leafy solitude;

And no white horse or scarlet sleeve
Shall sprinkle down the woodland ride
Where paths between the chestnuts cleave,
And mists the morning stories thief
From men in different mood astride.

In such a place my foxes should
Live free to mate and breed and kill
Within the ambush of my wood,
Scorning the huntsman's hardihood
Hallooing on the stranger's hill.

Though warring men must stain the west
Doubly with sunset's barbarous dye,

COLLECTED POEMS

Leaving the plumes of manhood's crest,
A shameful yet a proud bequest,
In trails of blood across the sky,

Within the acres that I rule,
The little patch of peace I vaunt,
Where ways are safe and shadows cool,
Shall come no scarlet-coated fool
To tease my foxes from their haunt.

Sept. 1932

* THE OWL

EACH dusk I saw, while those I loved the most
Chattered of present or of alien things,
The rhythmic owl returning like a ghost
Across the orchard cruising on wide wings.

She went, she came, she swooped, she sought the
height

Where her young brood hid snoring for the mouse;
Tirelessly weaving on her silent flight
Between the laden branches and the house,

Soft and nocturnal, creamy as a moth;
But to the timorous small colony
Crouched in the grass, as fatal as a Goth
Ranging the plains in armed panoply.

Such beauty and such cruelty were hers,
Such silent beauty, taloned with a knife;
Such innocence and fearfulness were theirs,
The little denizens intent on life,

That, terror swooping on my heart's alarm,
I wondered what dire spirit, hushed, adrift,
Might go abroad to do my loves most harm,
Silent and pouncing, ruinous and swift?

May 1933

* THE MANOR-HOUSE

RED-BERRIED yews above the churchyard wall,
A waning moon that squints behind the spire,
And cats that prowl on stealthy pads, and call
Among the tombs with rakish live desire.

How dead the dead! how live the living! wait:
Although the moon sinks stagnant in the moat,
The ruttish night's astir to procreate,
And from the farmyard comes the reek of goat.

Even within the house, beneath the thatch,
Down the long passage chequered by the panes,
Some lover steals to lift the furtive latch
And find fulfilment till the moonlight wanes.

So, since the house was built, demure and sweet
Among the innocent meadows and the elms,
Tormented man and beast on secret feet
Have paced the passion of nocturnal realms.

And what's to choose between them, as they range
Pricked by the urge of living, and its lies,
Save that the man's less noisy and more strange,
Nor howls his frank desire to the skies?

* ASTRONOMICAL ERROR

For Gwen St. Aubyn

Two worlds, bright neighbours of the dominant
moon,

I nightly watched from drenching fields of June;
Each twilight nailed them to a lucent sky
Early, before the constellations drew
Their golden pattern in ordained tattoo,
—Cassiopeia, Hercules,
Aquila, Pegasus, in studded course,
The wingèd eagle and the dangled horse,
Heroes and fatal women drawn on high
Above the earthly owl that called "Tu-hoo!"

And one I thought was Jupiter, and one
A small companion, humbler than the sun,
The moon their great duenna while they loved.
But so in love's companionship they moved,
I shrank from search to find if one indeed
Were Jupiter with all his moons like loves,
(Jupiter lavish of his kingly seed
To goddesses and women in his bed,
Or Venus roving in a flight of doves,
Her flaxen hair blown streaming from her head.

COLLECTED POEMS

For who was I, to ask what royal rape
Or what incestuous adultery
Venus and Jupiter in stellar shape
Committed under Cynthia's civil eye?

Alas, among the yet invisible stars,
The one was Jupiter, the other Mars.

1933

* INVITATION TO CAST OUT CARE

For Ethel Smyth

COME, stoop between the hazel leaves,
 And thrust the chestnut branch aside;
 The tangle that the woodland weaves
 Forgets the waiting world outside;
 So in this cave of watered green
 Cool all thy thoughts by care opprest,
 And let the sunlight fall between
 The leaves, and dapple on thy breast.

The green of spring, the youngest green,
 That chequers all the leafy ride,
 Shall mesh the lattice of the screen
 Where fact and myth for thee divide;
 The bluebells drifting through the trees,
 A silent brook along the brook,
 Shall flow for thee as fantasies
 Escaped from reason's record-book.

The hyacinths between the trees'
 Young green shall spread as blue as smoke,
 Wider than dreams or prophecies
 Around the static, rooted oak;
 The little owl that cries by night

COLLECTED POEMS

Shall voice thine intimate despair,
And barking foxes shall invite
Thy sorrow to the listening air;

Wild influences that invoke
Communion with a mind perplexed,
And all the secrecies uncloak
That crouch within a spirit vexed,
And seek no ease in spoken words,
But in the chapel of the wood
Take wing among the boughs with birds
To find a perfect brotherhood.

1932

*EASTER AND PENTECOST ENCLOSE THE
SPRING . . .

EASTER and Pentecost enclose the spring,
White toll-gates on the turnpike of the seasons;
Easter has set the hinges on to swing
Opening April with her funny treasons.
Now what will April in her wallet bring
To toss along the road for our diversion?
What handfuls thrown in air of fluttering
Wild petals drifting down in slow dispersion?
What flock of rooks and starlings on the wing
Blown about heaven rough as cindered paper,
What whirl of clouds, what grasses in a ring,
What tails that frisk, what kids and lambs that caper?
April and May their foolish handfuls fling
Across the meadows and along the hedges,
And credulous man each year stands marvelling
At the renewal of his privileges;
Forgets each year,—poor winter's starveling,—
The spring's surprise, that faster comes and faster,
The change between each dawn and evening
Once he has passed the turnpike gate of Easter.
Then is the winter a forgotten thing,
Then is the road one silly swift procession,
While nature holds in annual junketing
The paschal and the pentecostal session.

April 1929

* STORMY EVENING

THE eve was windy, but the night is still.
And so my heart, that blew with wild desires,
Stands quiet now as pine-trees on the hill
That raged at eve with sullen sunset fires.

The eve was windy, and the night is still.
Oh quiet night, oh stars, what will you bring
At dawn to meet the pine-trees on the hill?
To meet my heart when morning branches sing?

The eve was windy, rattling latticed panes;
I drew my curtains, safe against the gale,
Shutting the pine-trees out among the rains,
Shutting my heart in, lest the storm prevail.

Now that the night is still, and windy eve
Is gone into the many quiet nights
Of quiet stars, those strangers that deceive,
Sinking within the lake their foreign lights,

What shall I do, when morning breaks again,
Or still, or stormy, over woods and heart?
Shall I rise up to welcome freshened pain,
Or draw my curtains on a life apart?

STORMY EVENING

Would I could take the life of this my wood,
The wind, the stormy sunset on the pines,
Each in their symmetry, and find them good,
And synthesize their change in these my lines;

Then might I rest, and gather to a knot
Myself and nature in our variation,
And then to each successive mood allot
Its simple, scientific explanation.

1933

* ON THE LAKE

A CANDLE lit in darkness of black waters,
A candle set in the drifting prow of a boat,
And every tree to itself a separate shape,
Now plummy, now an arch; tossed trees
Still and dishevelled; dishevelled with past growth,
Forgotten storms; left tufted, tortured, sky-rent,
Even now in stillness; stillness on the lake,
Black, reflections pooled, black mirror
Pooling a litten candle, taper of fire;
Pooling the sky, double transparency
Of sky in water, double elements,
Lying like lovers, light above, below;
Taking, from one another, light; a gleaming,
A glow reflected, fathoms deep, leagues high,
Two distances meeting at a film of surface
Thin as a membrane, sheet of surface, fine
Smooth steel; two separates, height and depth,
Able to touch, giving to one another
All their profundity, all their accidents,
—Changeable mood of clouds, permanent stars,—
Like thoughts in the mind hanging a long way off,
Revealed between lovers, friends. Peer in the water
Over the boat's edge; seek the sky's night-heart;
Are they near, are they far, those clouds, those stars
Given, reflected, pooled? are they so close

ON THE LAKE

For a hand to clasp, to lift them, feel their shape,
Explore their reality, take a rough possession?
Oh no! too delicate, too shy for handling,
They tilt at a touch, quiver to other shapes,
Dance away, change, are lost, drowned, scared;
Hands break the mirror, speech's crudity
The surmise, the divining;
Such things so deeply held, so lightly held,
Subtile, imponderable, as stars in water
Or thoughts in another's thoughts.
Are they near, are they far, those stars, that know-
ledge?
Deep? shallow? solid? rare? The boat drifts on,
And the litten candle single in the prow,
The small, immediate candle in the prow,
Burns brighter in the water than any star.

*SOMETIMES WHEN NIGHT . . .

SOMETIMES when night has thickened on the woods,
And we in the house's square security
Read, speak a little, read again,
Read life at second-hand, speak of small things,
Being content and withdrawn for a little hour
From the dangers and fears that are either wholly
absent

Or wholly invading,—sometimes a shot rings out,
Sudden and sharp; complete. It has no sequel,
No sequel for us, only the sudden crack
Breaking a silence followed by a silence,
Too slight a thing for comment; slight, and usual,
A shot in the dark, fired by a hand unseen
At a life unknown; finding, or missing, the mark?
Bringing death? bringing hurt? teaching, perhaps,
escape,

Escape from a present threat, a threat recurrent,
Or ending, once and for all? But we read on,
Since the shot was not at our hearts, since the mark
was not

Your heart or mine, not this time, my companion.

•

*BLACK TARN

For Pat Dansey

THE road ends with the hills.
No track continues the fair and easy way
That leads in safety beside the valley lake,
Skirting the lake, the lake of candid waters
Sleek among rising fells. It is a valley
Veined by one road, one smooth and certain road,
Walled on the fell-side, walled against the boulders,
The rough fell-side, where few penurious sheep
Find a scrimp pasture, stray, crop, wander;
A road whence the traveller may scan the valley,
Seeing the lake, the prospect north and south,
The foot of the fells; and, lifting up his eyes,
Their heads, mist-dwelling;
He may explore the ferns, the little lichens,
The tiny life at fell's foot, peaty pools,
Learning their detail, finding out their habit;
This, and the general prospect of the valley,
Lie and proportion of the fells, sky, waters,
All from the road. But the road ends with the hills.

At the valley's head the road ends, making no curve
To return whence it came, but, bluntly barred,
Stops with the slope. The road's crisp gravel

COLLECTED POEMS

Softens to turf, to swamps of spongy peat,
Boulders flung down in anger, brown streams poured
From inaccessible sources. Dull brute hills
Mount sullen, trackless; who would climb, must
climb

Finding a way; steps tentative,
Thoughtful, and unrelated, steps of doubt,
Sometimes of exultation. Now see the lake
With its companion road, safe in the valley,
That bird's-eye, easy conquest. Left below
That known, seen, travelled region. Sagging clouds
Veil the high hills, raze the peaks level,
Wimple in white the hidden tors, the final
Pricking of height towards sky; still through the mist
Each conquered patch spreads visible, unrolls
Its footing of turf or stone.

Faith knows the shrouded peaks, their composition,
Granite and shale, their sundered rock
Like an axe's cleavage, wedge of scars.
Faith knows they wait there, may be scaled.
But few climb higher than these middle reaches,
Difficult, wild enough; slopes to be won
Nor wholly relinquished, even when steps return
To the easy lowland, to the calm lake's shore,
For they abide in the mind, as a value held,
A gain achieved.

Most certainly I remember
A lonely tarn in the hills, a pool in a crater,
Lustrous as armour, wet rocks, and still, round pool.
Lustrous, but with a sheen not taken from heaven,

BLACK TARN

Not with a light as lit the lake below
In the open valley, frank and susceptible,
Receiving and giving back; but inward, sullen,
In the crater's cup, as drawing out
Some dark effulgence from subterranean depths,
Self-won, self-suffered. Stones I threw
Sank, forced the surface to a ripple,
But like a plummet dropped into earth's bowels
Were swallowed, and the satanic darkness closed
As though no wound had been.

I have seen Black Tarn,
Shivered it for an instant, been afraid.
Looked into its waters, seen there my own image
As an upturned mask that floated
Just under the surface, within reach, beyond reach.
There are tarns among hills, for all who climb the
hills,
Tarns suddenly stumbled on, sudden points of
meaning
Among the rough negative hills, reward
Precious and fearful, leaving a discontent
With the lake in the valley, and the road beside the
lake,
And the dwellings of men, the safety, and the ease.

* PENN-Y-PASS

WHAT was that place where chance with nightfall
halted

Our casual journeying? Had it a name, a designation
On maps? a country, king, and government?

Had it so concrete, firm, a dignity?

Was it so many feet above sea-level

Heaved up on the wrinkling of a shrunken planet?

Had it a longitude, a point in space?

I have forgotten; but the wind swept cold,

I know, through the mountain pass, and sang in the
wires

Stretched on ungainly poles up a rocky track;

Boulders had fallen from the mountain top,

Making a stairway, steps for a giant's stride,

Black boulders spilt from the mountain, top to base,

And man had come, rearing ungainly poles,

Stretching his wires, wires for his little news,

And the wind sang in the wire, making a lyre

Of man's contrivance when the stars were bright.

And the poles had a beauty, straight and unnatural,

Being designed for man and man's small use

Crossing the mountains; but the mountains took
them,

The wind and the mountains took them, made them
part

PENN-Y-PASS

Of their greater concert, bent their straightness
crooked,
Mechanical straightness of a man's designing,
Hostile to freakish Nature; Nature took them,
The poles, the wire, and sent her winds so singing
That the straightness curved to a tune, a whining
tune,
Like the voice of the mountains and the mountain
wind,
Lament of the heights; and chance would have it so
That we crossed the wires and intercepted the tune
On a given hour at dusk on a given day,
Once, and were gone by morning; but I think
That the wires still whine there when the wind's
uneasy
Lament sighs through them and wakes them to a
music
That man who set them in their mechanical straight-
ness
Had not intended. What was that mountain pass
Where nightfall halted us in our casual journey?

BEECHWOODS AT KNOLE

How do I love you, beech-trees, in the autumn,
Your stone-grey columns a cathedral nave`
Processional above the earth's brown glory!

I was a child, and loved the knurly tangle
Of roots that coiled above a scarp like serpents,
Where I might hide my treasure with the squirrels.

I was a child, and splashed my way in laughter
Through drifts of leaves, where underfoot the beech-
nuts
Split with crisp crackle to my great rejoicing.

Red are the beechen slopes below Shock Tavern,
Red is the bracken on the sandy Furze-field,
Red are the stags and hinds by Bo-Pit Meadows,

The rutting stags that nightly through the beech-
woods
Bell out their challenge, carrying their antlers
Proudly beneath the antlered autumn branches.

I was a child, and heard the red deer's challenge
Prowling and belling underneath my window,
Never a cry so haughty or so mournful.

LEOPARDS AT KNOLE

LEOPARDS on the gable-ends,
Leopards on the painted stair,
Stiff the blazoned shield they bear,
Or and gules, a bend of vair,
Leopards on the gable-ends,
Leopards everywhere.

Guard and vigil in the night
While the ancient house is sleeping
They three hundred years are keeping,
Nightly from their stations leaping,
Shadows black in moonlight bright,
Roof to gable creeping.

Rigid when the day returns,
Up aloft in sun or rain
Leopards at their posts again
Watch the shifting pageant's train;
And their jewelled colour burns
In the window-pane.

Often on the painted stair,
As I passed abstractedly,
Velvet footsteps, two and three,
Padded gravely after me.
—There was nothing, nothing there,
Nothing there to see.

NIGHT

For Harold Nicolson

MOONLIGHT through lattice throws a chequered
square;

Night! and I wake in my low-ceilinged room
To cherished silence deep with harmony;
Sweet are the flutes of night-time, sweet the truce
Lies between day and day. This wise old night,
That gives a pause and armistice to strife!
The murmurous diapason of the dark
Within the house made quick and intimate
By tiny noise—a bat? a mouse? a moth
Bruising against the ceiling? or a bird
Nested beneath the eaves? night, grave and huge
Outside with swell of soughing through the boughs,
Whispering far across unscythèd meadows,
Dying in dim cool cloisters of the woods.

I have been absent. I have found unchanged
The oaks, the slope and order of the fields;
I knew the wealden fragrance, and that old
Dear stubborn enemy of mine, the clay.
Nothing to mark the difference of year
But young wheat springing where I left the roots,
And last year's pasture browned to this year's plough;

NIGHT

Last year the crop was niggard on the orchard,
But blossom now foretells the weighted branches,
And the great stack, that like a galleon
Rode beneath furled tarpaulins last July,
Showed its bare brushwood as I passed to-day.
Where the sun rises, that I know of old;
Knowledge precedes me round the turning lane,
And I could take you still where orchis grows
Friendly with cowslip; where the bluebell pulls
Smooth from the bulb, bleached where it grew concealed,
Hidden from light; the tiny brook is eager,
Quick with spring rains, bright April rains, and fills
The pool where drowsy cattle slouch to drink.

Familiar! oh, familiar! native speech
Comes not more readily than that dear sense
Of bend and depth of country. This is Kent,
Unflaunting England, where the steaming mould,
Not plaintive, not regretful, lies content
That leaves should spring from sacrifice of leaves.

My Saxon weald! my cool and candid weald!
Dear God! the heart, the very heart of me
That plays and strays, a truant in strange lands,
Always returns and finds its inward peace,
Its swing of truth, its measure of restraint,
Here among meadows, orchards, lanes, and shaws.
Take me then close, O branches, take me close;
Whisper to me the secrets of the sap,

COLLECTED POEMS

You branches fragile, tentative, that stretch
Your moonlit blossom to my open window,
Messengers of the gentle weald, encroaching
So shyly on the shelter of the house;
Cradle me, hammock me amongst you; let
Night's quietude so drench my sleepy spirit
That morning shall not rob me of that calm.
Your buds against my pulses; so I lie
Wakeful as though in tree-tops, and the sap
Creeps through my blood, nocturnal pregnant earth.

. . . The birds are restless underneath the eaves,
Down in the byre the uneasy cattle stir,
And through the fret of branches grows the dawn.

ONE DAY

Joy have I had of life this vigorous day
Since sunrise when I took the wealden way
And my fair country as I rapid strode
Lay round the turn of the familiar road
In mists diaphanous as seas in foam.

And all the orchards cried me welcome home.

I drove the spade that turned the heavy loam,
Bending the winter to the needs of spring,
The soft air winnowing
The thistledown that blew along the hedge.
A little moorhen rippled in the sedge;
A distant sheep-dog barked; the day was still,
For summer's ghost lay wintry on the hill.
I worked in peace; an aeroplane above
Crooned through the heaven coloured like a dove.

Within the house I lit a fire
And coaxed the friendly kettle on to boil.
My boots were heavy with the wealden soil,
My hunger eager from the glow of toil.
Fresh bread had I; brown eggs; a little meat;
Clear water, and an apple all-too-sweet.
Freedom I drank for my delirious wine,

COLLECTED POEMS

And Shelley gave me company divine.
What more could heart desire?

And when the orange of the sunset burned,
I laid aside my tools and townward turned,
Seeing across the uplands of the Weald
The ploughteams straining on the half-brown field.
I sang aloud; my limbs were rich with health,
As brooding winter rich with summer's wealth.

January 1918

A SAXON SONG

TOOLS with the comely names,
Mattock and scythe and spade,
Couth and bitter as flames,
Clean, and bowed in the blade,—
A man and his tools make a man and his trade.

Breadth of the English shires,
Hummock and kame and mead,
Tang of the reeking byres,
Land of the English breed,—
A man and his land make a man and his creed.

Leisurely flocks and herds,
Cool-eyed cattle that come
Mildly to wonted words,
Swine that in orchards roam,—
A man and his beasts make a man and his home.

Children sturdy and flaxen
Shouting in brotherly strife,
Like the land they are Saxon,
Sons of a man and his wife,—
For a man and his loves make a man and his life.

APRIL

WHEN evening sun had beat the rain
And skies were washed so primrose-clean,
We swung the orchard gate again
To let the cattle down the lane;

To let with ripened udders pass
The heavy milch-cows one by one,
And underfoot the blossom was
Like scattered snow upon the grass.

The steep wet road was like a shield
After the rain; and, slouching on,
We idly grumbled at the yield
Of apple-orchards in the Weald.

ARCADY IN ENGLAND

I MET some children in a wood,
A happy and tumultuous rout
That came with many a silly shout
And darted hither and about
(As in a stream the fickle trout),
To ease their pagan lustihood.

And in their midst they led along
A goat with wreaths about his neck
That they had taken pains to deck
To join the bacchanalian throng.

And one of them was garlanded
With strands of wild convolvulus
About his ringlets riotous,
And carried rowan-berries red.

And one, the eldest of the band,
Whose life was seven summers glad,
Was all in flowered muslin clad,
And naked dancing feet she had
To lead the sylvan saraband.
With hazel skin and coral bead
A gipsy dryad of the mead
She seemed; she led the gay stampede
With fruited branches in her hand.

COLLECTED POEMS

For all were bearing autumn fruit;
Some, apples on the loaded bough,
And pears that on the orchard's brow
With damask-plums are hanging now;
And much they had of woodland loot,
Of berries black and berries blue,
Of fircones, and of medlars too;
And one, who bore no plunder, blew
On reeds like an Arcadian flute.

They passed, and still I stood knee-deep
In soaking grass to watch their train.
They wound along the marshy lane
And crossed a streamlet with a leap,
And as I saw them once again
They passed a shepherd and his sheep.

And you might think, I made this song
For joy of song as I strode along
One day between the Kentish shaws,
Slashing at scarlet hips and haws.
But thinking so, you nothing know
Of children taken unawares,
Of tinkers' tents among the gorse,
The poor lean goat, the hobbled horse,
And painted vans for country fairs.

SONNET

THIS little space which scented box encloses
Is blue with lupins and is sharp with thyme.
My garden all is overblown with roses,
My spirit all is overblown with rhyme,
As like a drunken honeybee I waver
From house to garden and again to house,
And, undetermined which delight to favour,
On verse and rose alternately carouse.

Adam, were you, in your primeval plenty,
A poet and a gardener in one?
Did you with easy song the blossoms sheave,
In Eden where the blooms by ten and twenty
Sprang up beneath the magic of the sun,
To deck the brows of your capricious Eve?

SWEET TIME

SWEET Thyme, that underfoot so meekly grows
In humble company
Of splendid rose,
Is satisfied to be
The acolyte, each gardener knows,
Of lavender, of rue, and rosemary.

Sweet Time, that pilfers all my precious years,
Will no wise blandishment
Or threat of tears
Bring you to pause, content?
—Hard-hearted greybeard, as he went,
He winked at me, and clicked his wicked shears.

SORROW OF DEPARTURE

For my Father. 1914

HE sat among the shadows lost,
And heard the careless voice speak on
Of life when he was gone from home,
Of days that he had made his own,
Familiar schemes that he had known,
And dates that he had cherished most
As star-points in the year to come,
And he was suddenly alone,
Thinking (not bitterly,
But with a grave regret) that he
Was in that room a ghost.

He sat among the shades apart,
The careless voice he scarcely heard.
In that arrested hour there stirred
Shy birds of beauty in his heart.

The clouds of March he would not see
Across the sky race royally,
Nor yet the drift of daffodil
He planted with so glad a hand,
Nor yet the loveliness he planned
For summer's sequence to fulfil,

COLLECTED POEMS

Nor trace upon the hill
The annual waking of the land,
Nor meditative stand
To watch the turning of the mill.

He would not pause above the Weald
With twilight falling dim,
And mark the chequer-board of field,
The water gleaming like a shield,
The oast-house in the elms concealed,
Nor see, from heaven's chalice-rim,
The vintaged sunset brim,
Nor yet the high, suspended star
Hanging eternally afar.

These things would be, but not for him.

At summer noon he would not lie
One with his cutter's rise and dip,
One with the wind and sea and sky,
And watch the dappled waves go by,
The sea-gulls scream and slip;
White sails, white birds, white clouds, white foam,
White cliffs that curled the love of home
Around him like a whip. . . .
He would not see that summer noon
Fade into dusk from light,
While he on shifting waters bright
Sailed idly on, beneath the moon
Climbing the dome of night.

SORROW OF DEPARTURE

This was his dream of happy things
That he had loved through many springs,
And never more might know,
Since man must pass the shrouded gate
Companioned by his secret fate,
And he must lonely go,
And none can help or understand,
For other men may touch his hand,
But none the soul below.

1914

A FALLEN SOLDIER

HOPE held his hand and ran with him together.
Despair, the coward, at their coming fled.
Like a young ram, he shook his hornèd head,
And broke away from his restraining tether.
He loved the sea, he loved the cleansing flame;
No woman yet, his heart was all too young;
Over the plain of life his heart was flung,
Seeking for jeopardies that he might tame.
He cloaked his faith with laughter, but his faith
Was certain, as his confidence was gay,
And laughing went he, till on that last day
The hands stretched out to life were clasped by death.

1915

FALLEN YOUTH

O REDOLENT things most dear to Youth on earth,
Friendship of other men; the hunter's horn;
The strong fatigue of practised limbs; the mirth
Of little birds in coppices and corn;
Work's satisfaction; leisure's bland delight;
The grateful sinking into sleep at night;

Speed, with the winds of heaven at your heels,
And grimy Power, and all you brilliant ones
That leap and sparkle 'mid the din of wheels,
A thousand little stars and little suns;
And streets of cities threatening the sky;
Cranes, wharves, and smoke in billows hanging high;

O stately Bridge, the country's arching frame,
A needle's eye to thread the river through;
Free ships, that rove and perish without fame;
Rich days of idleness, and soul that grew
Suddenly certain after doubting years,
And won through joy the wisdom lost through tears;

O Downs of Sussex, flowing swift and clean
Like stretchèd dogs along the English shore,
With cleanliness of athletes, and the lean
Brown flanks that course above the hare-belled floor;

COLLECTED POEMS

O winds, that jangle all those little bells,
And tangle hair of nymphs in hidden dells;

O wandering Road, stranger and instant friend,—
For Youth a gipsy ever was at heart,—
Highway and packway, path with many a bend
That keep your mystery a thing of art;
O pools of friendly water; little linns;
O sudden views of country; wayside inns;

Labour of harvest; cider sweet and good;
Casual friends with tales of travel far;
Beauty of women; sunlight through a wood;
Companionable beasts; all things which are,
Weep for him! weep for Youth that laughed so
 bright,
Extravagantly fallen in the fight.

1915

TESTAMENT

WHEN I am dead, let not my limbs be given
To rot amongst the dead I never knew,
But cast my ashes wide under wide heaven,
Or to my garden let me still be true,

And, like the ashes I was wont to save
Preciously from the hearth beneath my fire,
Lighten the soil with mine. Not, not the grave!
I loved the soil I fought, and this is my desire.

SAILING SHIPS

LYING on Downs above the wrinkling bay
I with the kestrels shared the cleanly day,
The candid day; wind-shaven, brindled turf;
Tall cliffs; and long sea-line of marbled surf
From Cornish Lizard to the Kentish Nore
Lipping the bulwarks of the English shore,
While many a lovely ship below sailed by
On unknown errand, kempt and leisurely;
And after each, oh, after each, my heart
Fled forth, as, watching from the Downs apart,
I shared with ships good joys and fortunes wide
That might befall their beauty and their pride;

Shared first with them the blessed void repose
Of oily days at sea, when only rose
The porpoise's slow wheel to break the sheen
Of satin water indolently green;
When for'ard the crew, caps tilted over eyes,
Lay heaped on deck; slept; murmured; smoked;
threw dice;
The sleepy summer days; the summer nights
(The coast pricked out with rings of harbour-lights),
The motionless nights, the vaulted nights of June
When high in the cordage drifts the entangled moon,
And blocks go knocking, and the sheets go slapping,

SAILING SHIPS

And lazy swells against the sides come lapping;
And summer mornings off red Devon rocks,
Faint inland bells at dawn and crowing cocks.

Shared swifter days, when headlands into ken
Trode grandly; threatened; and were lost again,
Old fangs along the battlemented coast;
And followed still my ship, when winds were most
Night-purified, and, lying steeply over,
She fled the wind as flees a girl her lover,
Quickened by that pursuit for which she fretted,
Her temper by the contest proved and whetted;
Wild stars swept overhead; her lofty spars
Reared to a ragged heaven sown with stars
As leaping out from narrow English ease
She faced the roll of long Atlantic seas.

Her captain then was I, I was her crew,
The mind that laid her course, the wake she drew,
The waves that rose against her bows, the gales,—
Nay, I was more: I was her very sails
Rounded before the wind, her eager keel,
Her straining mast-heads, her responsive wheel,
Her pennon stiffened like a swallow's wing;
Yes, I was all her slope and speed and swing,
Whether by yellow lemons and blue sea
She dawdled through the isles off Thessaly,
Or saw the palms like sheaves of scimitars
On desert's verge below the sunset bars,
Or passed the girdle of the planet where

COLLECTED POEMS

The Southern Cross looks over to the Bear,
And strayed, cool Northerner beneath strange skies,
Flouting the lure of tropic estuaries,
Down that long coast, and saw Magellan's Clouds
arise.

And some that beat up-Channel homeward-bound
I watched, and wondered what they might have
found,

What alien ports enriched their teeming hold
With crates of fruit or bars of unwrought gold?
And thought how London clerks with paper-clips
Had filed the bills of lading of those ships,
Clerks that had never seen the embattled sea,
But wrote down jettison and barratry,
Perils, Adventures, and the Act of God,
Having no vision of such wrath flung broad;
Wrote down with weary and accustomed pen
The classic dangers of seafaring men;
And wrote "Restraint of Princes", and "the Acts
Of the King's Enemies", as vacant facts,
Blind to the ambushed seas, the encircling roar
Of angry nations foaming into war.

PHANTOM

I SAW a ship sailing,
No other ship in sight.
Steadily she was sailing
Although the wind fell light.
Although the wind was failing
Still she kept sailing.

No hand there that steered her,
No wind that strained her sheet.
And as I gazed I feared her:
Why should she be so fleet
Since no crew's chanty cheered her,
And no wind neared her?

Her strange sure motion
Carried her swiftly past;
Over the rim of ocean
I watched her dip her mast.
Still no wind blew in motion
Across the ocean.

EVENING

WHEN little lights in little ports come out,
Quivering down through water with the stars,
And all the fishing fleet of slender spars
Range at their moorings, veer with tide about;

When race of wind is stilled and sails are furled,
And underneath our single riding-light
The curve of black-ribbed deck gleams palely white,
And slumbrous waters pool a slumbrous world,

—Then, and then only, have I thought how sweet
Old age might sink upon a windy youth,
Quiet beneath the riding-light of truth,
Weathered through storms, and gracious in retreat.

“SUMURUN”,
CORNWALL, 1920

* SUMMER'S ENDING

So this day, too, goes. Nothing left
Of all these hours, close-woven of many strands.
O prodigal, summer's spendthrift, weft,
Year's pattern, nothing, nothing left?

Left of these days, a summer stretch, a blur;
O falling water, touch of hands!
Fill in the pattern, life's adventurer,
Each to his own, sharpened design or blur,
Clumsy or deft.

Days passed in idleness, days without trace,
Too actual for record, days lived, days known,
Coursed through the blood, as through the heart
 apace
Veins' blood, arteries' blood, drops without trace
Circle, recur.

Anonymous corpuscles, drops, hours, days,
Making the stream, the pattern, each to his own,
Private for each, and different; silent ways,
Moments of being, years made up of days,
Man's commonplace.

* YEAR'S END

Now when the weather darkens, and the days,
Over the ledger of my soul I pore;
I sit alone beside the beechen blaze,
Like an old merchant reckoning up his store,
Counting my poverty in sad amaze.

Without, the lost wind cries; the angry rain
Beats on the lattices a scourging flail,
As would some presence on the hurricane
Force entrance, fill my dwelling with the gale,
And privacy with monstrous scorn profane.

But still hold out the walls of my retreat;
There's no storm here except the storm within,
Tearing the last poor rags of self-deceit,
Setting him naked with all lying kin,
As I sit adding up my balance-sheet.

What! years of commerce show so mean a sum?
Insolvent blunderer, what, still perplexed
With the first problems, staled and wearisome?
Still hesitant, still doubtful, and still vexed?
I go in ignorance as I did come.

What have I gathered, packed into old bales,
Stuffed into chests, or dusty on my shelves?

YEAR'S END

Lumber of knowledge, shards of broken grails,
Forgotten faiths, and husks of bygone selves,
Not weight or worth to tip the smallest scales.

If all the barter, all the trafficking,
Exchange of coin and bargaining of thought
That fill the folios of my huckstering,
Total to one unprofitable nought,
Shall I not clear my goods and quit the ring?

November 1926

ABROAD

* PERSIA

THE passes are blocked by snow.
No word comes through, no message, and no letter.
Only the eagles plane above the snow,
And wolves come down upon the villages.
The barrier of mountains is the end,
The edge of the world to us in wintry Persia.
We are self-contained, shut off.
Only the telegraph ticks out its flimsy sheets,
Bringing the distant news of deaths of princes.
Day after day the cold and marvellous sun
Rides in the cold, the pale, the marvellous heaven,
Cutting the blue and icy folds of shadow
Aslant the foot-hills where the snow begins.
So would I have it, pure in isolation,
With scarcely a rumour of the varied world
Leaping the mountain-barrier in disturbance.

Are there not hearts that find their high fulfilment
Alone, with ice between them and their friends?

* THE PERSIAN FLUTE

A PERSIAN shepherd by a waterfall
Piping to please himself among his goats,
Gave me this flute, that now upon my wall
Hangs, hollow exile, prisoning its notes.

Its heart is broken; silent are its strains.
I cannot wake the little Persian flute.
It does not, will not, know me; it remains
Beneath my fingers obstinately mute.

Yet this slim reed, when stars were overhead,
And dusk was vocal with the bleating flocks,
Sent up its pure and melancholy thread
Of music by the river and the rocks.

I thought that I should wake that note again
With one clear echo of the hills apart,
Summoning Persia to an English lane,—
I had not reckoned with a broken heart.

Shall we go back together, my flute and I,
To find again the shepherd of Shalil,
And when the planet Venus travels high
Above the myrtle grove of Murdafil,

THE PERSIAN FLUTE

Make each our separate music? For I too
Am silent sometimes, thinking of those stars,
That solitude, those evenings waning blue,
And the lost beauty of the plains of Fars.

*NOSTALGIA

THAT day must come, when I shall leave my friends,
My loves, my garden, and the bush of balm
That grows beside my door, for the world's ends:
A Persian valley where I might find calm.

And this is no romance; the place is no
Vague lovely Persia of a poet's tale,
But a very valley where some cornfields grow
And peasants beat the harvest with a flail.

I saw it, as I saw the pigeon-towers
Streaked white with dung, and goat-kids born in
 blood;
And saw the early almond spray its flowers
Through breaches in the wall of sun-burnt mud.

Brutality and beauty shared the sun;
Necessity of crops the river-bed;
And I without such sunlight am undone,
Without such rivers wilt unharvested.

1932

* AT RHEY. [RHAGES]

WHAT says the Persian poet? *'In travel meet together*

The native of Merv and of Rhey, the Roman and the Kurd.'

Now at Rhey, in the Persian summer weather,

I saw on the rocks a swallow, an English bird.

I wondered, had it nested under a rafter

There in Kent, built a nest of Kentish clay?

Brought up its young to the sound of English
laughter,

And heard the English laughter again at Rhey?

The rocks were red in the sun, the rocks were bare;

Ruin was on the hillside, shards were found

On the rocky hillside there

Beneath a little scraping of the ground.

Shards of Darius' and Alexander's day

Where the swallow skimmed the mound

As if Alexander had not passed that way,

But only the months gone by in journeying

From the meadows to the red rocks in the plain,

From the red rocks to the meadows back again,

On the impulse of a blind instinctive wing,

As if Raphael and Tobias had never come to Rhey.

November 1926

* A BOWL OF BLUE BEADS

I BOUGHT these beads in Isfahan;
I bought a handful for a kran,
—That's sixpence—at the motley stall
Against the Meidan's northern wall,
At evening when the plane-tree's cool
Shadow blessed the dirty pool,
And the great arch of the bazaar
Gaped like a cave crepuscular.
Blue beads to keep the evil eye
Away as horse and mule go by
Through narrow streets between the brown
High walls of mud that make the town,
And gain the melon-fields that lie
Where the desert meets the sky.

Now, in a bowl, in exile, they
Speak Persia to an English day;
Blue as the skies that once in March
Were framed for me beneath the arch
Of a ruined caravanserai.
And oh, how glad, how glad am I
That Persia is no lovely lie
For me, but sharp reality.

Feb. 1928

* A PERSIAN LEGEND

LEGEND says, that the Kings
Set out from Shiraz
On laden journey
With redolent things:
Frankincense, myrrh,
Led to the manger
Where *He* lay with *Her*,
Christ with Mary,
Strangely conceived;
Myrrh and frankincense
Sleepy received.
But I must wonder,
I, (having been
To Shiraz where the desert
Melts into green,
Where the Judas-tree
And the cypress grove
Made Sa'di and Hafiz
Sing of love,)
How Baldassare
And Melchior
And Gaspar came
To Bethlehem; for
The way must have been
Too harsh for them,

COLLECTED POEMS

From soft Shiraz
To Bethlehem?
Over the mountains,
Down to the plain,
Even to greet
Messiah's reign;
Even to follow
A western star,
The way must have been
Too harsh, too far—
All Arabia
Stretched between.

But those were days
For faith and youth,
When kings might journey
In search of truth;
And deserts were
But a corridor
For Baldassare
And Melchior.
Shiraz the soft
Appeared to them
Less than the desert
To Bethlehem;
The way appeared
Less harsh, less far,
Than the urgency
Of the western star.

A PERSIAN LEGEND

Else how should the kings
Of Shiraz set out
Across the desert,
Clear of doubt?

June 1928

MIRAGE

A RUSSIAN LEGEND

THERE travelled north from Kurdistan along the
lone Siberian trails

A merchant with his caravan and Eastern barter in
his bales.

He rode ahead, he rode apart, the city of Irkutsk his
goal,

Upon his lean Circassian foal, and after came the
lumbering cart

With creaking wheel, deliberate spoke, and water-
bullocks in the yoke;

And after these in single string the boorish camels
following,

Slouching with high unwieldy packs like howdahs
heaped upon their backs;

With slaver hanging from their lips and hatred
worming in their brain

They slouched beneath their drivers' whips across
the white and mournful plain.

The merchant riding on alone saw not the white in-
cessant snow,

He only saw the metal's glow, the colour of the
precious stone;

MIRAGE

He lingered on the merchandise that he had brought
from Kurdistan,
And turned, and swept his caravan with doting and
voluptuous eyes,
For there were choice Bokhara rugs, and daggers
with Damascus blade
And hafts of turquoise-studded jade, and phials rich
with scented drugs,
Koràns inscribed on ass's skin, and bales of silk from
Temesvâr,
And silver ear-rings beaten thin, and bargains from
the cool bazaar.

He felt the gold already pouched, he crooned to it
with horrid love,
As still the camels onward slouched with hatred of
the men that drove.

For thirty days the caravan trailed on behind the
merchant's foal,
Through Persia and through Turkestan, the city of
Irkutsk their goal;
They passed the fruitful hill-girt lands where dwelt
the fair-skinned Grecian race,
And came into the wilder place, and sighted vagrant
Cossack bands
That wandered with their flocks and herds, and
trafficked with the train of Kurds;
They stirred the ghost of Tamerlane, who swept that
way with Tartar hordes,

COLLECTED POEMS

The ghosts of dead barbarian lords, the Asiatic
hurricane;
They crossed the mighty road that runs from Moscow
through to China's wall,
And trod the path of nomad Huns and knew Siberia's
white pall
When fields of Persian asphodel were visions of a
distant day
And boundless snow around them lay, and noiseless
snow for ever fell,
Where soon the fleeting day was done, and on the
hard horizon low
They saw the scarlet ball of sun divided by the ridge
of snow
Sink down in skies incarnadine; and still with their
disjointed gait
And nursing their malignant hate, the camels kept
unbroken line.

When yet a hundred miles or more stretched out
between them and their goal
The merchant riding on before drew rein on his
Circassian foal
And called a halt with lifted hand as he had done
unfailingly
Each night since the monotony began with that un-
varied land.
The dusk was suddenly alive as shouting voices
passed the word,

MIRAGE

And all the drowsy train was stirred with movement
like a shaken hive.
The master merchant stiff from cramp was calling
for his saddle flask,
As each to his accustomed task ran swiftly in the
growing camp.
A tent like an inverted bell, vermilion with the dyes
of Tyre,
Was lifted rapidly and well, and like a torch the
kindled fire
Destroyed the night with leaping tongue, and in a
circle round the glow
Men shovelled back the melting snow, and skins and
Khelim rugs were flung—
And unforgotten were the needs of water-bullocks
standing by
Whose brows are stained with orange dye, whose
horns are looped with turquoise beads.
The pariah dogs that slink and prowl secured their
meat with furtive growl,
And one by one the camels bent complaining to their
warty knees
And grumbled at the men that went to loose their
girths and give them ease.

The merchant brooded silently on avaricious visions
bright
And listened to the revelry his men were making in
the night.

COLLECTED POEMS

For one, a young and favourite Kurd, a mongrel
child of the bazaar,
Whose voice was like a singing bird, was striking on
a harsh guitar—

I know a Room where tulips tall
And almond-blossom pale
Are coloured on the frescoed wall.

I know a River where the ships
Drift by with ghostly sail
And dead men chant with merry lips.

I know the Garden by the sea
Where birds with painted wings
Mottle the dark magnolia Tree.

I know the never-failing Source,
I know the Bush that sings,
The Vale of Gems, the flying Horse,

I know the Dog that was a Prince,
The talking Nightingale,
The Hill of glass, the magic Quince,

I know the lovely Lake of Van;
Yet, knowing all these things,
I wander with a caravan,
I wander with a caravan!

The cold moon rose remotely higher, insensibly the
voices hushed,

MIRAGE

And men with wine and laughter flushed were sleeping
all around the fire,
Till one alone sat on erect, his ready gun across his
knees,
The sentry of the night elect, guardian of sleeping
destinies.
The water-bullocks lay as dead; the dogs drew near
with noiseless tread,
And huddled in a loose-limbed heap beside the fire,
and through their sleep
They twitched at some remembered hunt; the
merchant in his sheepskin rolled
Within the tent saw dreams of gold; the camels with
uneasy grunt
And quake of their distorted backs slept on with
loathing by their packs.

At dawn the weary sentry rose to throw some brush-
wood on the flames,
Called on his comrades by their names, and turned
to greet the endless snows,
But then from his astonished lips a cry of unbeliev-
ing rang
And all the men towards him sprang, the camel
drivers with their whips,
The bullock driver with his yoke, and gazed in loud
bewilderment
Till slowly in his fur-lined cloak the merchant issued
from his tent.

COLLECTED POEMS

Then he too started at the sight and clamoured with
his clamorous men,
And swore he could not see aright, and rubbed his
eyes and stared again;
The camels came with lurching tread and stood in
loose fantastic ring
With neck outstretched and swaying head and
mouth all slackly slobbering,
And drew from some unclean recess within their
body's secret lair
A bladder smeared with filthiness that bubbled on
the morning air.

For there upon the shining plain a city radiantly
lay,
Coloured against the rising day, amid the snow a
jewelled stain,
And in her walls a spacious gate gave entrance to a
varied stream
Of folk that went incorporate like figures in a silent
dream,
And high above the roofs arose, more coloured for
the hueless snows,
The domes of churches, bronze and green, like pea-
cocks in their painted sheen.

The merchant, with a trembling hand extended far,
extended wide
Against illusion's fairyland, at length articulately
cried:

MIRAGE

“Irkutsk! but twice a hundred miles remained of
weary pilgrimage
Before we hoped with happy smiles to reach our final
anchorage.

But look again. That rosy tower that rises like a
tulip straight
Within the walls beside the gate, a balanced plume,
a springing flower,
And pointed with a lance-like spire of bronze, was
fifty years ago
—A boy, I saw it standing so,—demolished and
destroyed by fire.”

And one, a venerable Kurd, took up again the fallen
word:

“I travelled both as boy and man between Irkutsk
and Kurdistan,
But never since my beard was grown saw I that inn
beside the way
Wherewith the Council made away, full fifty counted
years aflow.”

They gazed upon the marvel long, the spectre city
wonderful,
Until the youth who made the song cried out, “We
grow too fanciful.
Irkutsk with roofs of coloured tiles lies distant twice
a hundred miles,

COLLECTED POEMS

And this, a city of the shades, a rainbow of the
 echoing air,
As fair as false, and false as fair, already into nothing
 fades."

And like a bubble, like the mist that in the valley
 faintly swirls,
Like orient sheen on sulky pearls, like hills remotely
 amethyst,
Like colours on Phoenician glass, like plumage on
 the 'fisher's wing,
Like music on the breath of spring, they saw the
 vision lift and pass,
Till only white unbroken snow stretched out before
 the caravan,
And the bewildered heart of man truth from de-
 lusion could not know.
But all the long laborious train moved slowly on its
 course again
Across the snow unbroken, white, and nursing each
 his private creed,
The merchant his illusive greed, the camels their
 illusive spite.

GENOESE MERCHANTS

THEY garnered wealth from far barbarian shores,
From Caffa, Tyre, and Trebizond,
And Tartar provinces beyond;
Furs, spices, oranges, and slaves.
High galleys waited, rung with tiers of oars,
Rippled reflections in the broken waves.

Bearded and serge-clad merchants, tightly-lipped,
They stood in groups along the foreign quays
Watching the cargo shipped
By coloured sons of Asia; these
Groaned loaded up the planks, and rolled
Their burdens down the hold;
And back the planks unburdened nimbly tripped,
Their pumpkin-fluted turbans and their scarves
Ballooning as they swarmed upon the wharves.

And some old shaven brightly-plumaged priest,
Drowsing outside his mosque when shadows fall
In lengthened lances pointing to the East
From fourfold minaret,
And through the iron grating in the wall
The sun-flushed Himalaya guards Tibet,
—He, fat and somnolent,
Yawning amongst the pigeons' sleek content,

COLLECTED POEMS

Opened one crafty, long, Mongolian eye,
And saw the slim Italian passing by
With soft-foot tread
Into the mosque, but never raised his head,
And slipped his cedar beads, and never stirred
Though the quick patter of the coins he heard
Falling in handfuls mixed of maize and rice
Flung to the pigeons, coins that were his price.

While far, in Europe, lay the Flemish fairs,
The marts of Ypres, the Jews of busy Thames
Greedy to clutch the unfamiliar gems,
And rummage in the bales of rich exotic wares.

IDLE THOUGHTS

SING of romantic palaces
In Tripoli, in Tripoli,
Above the sighing and the surge
Of the moaning sea, the slothful sea;
Of palaces upon the verge
Of the languid sea, the sleepy sea.

Sing of romantic palaces
In Venice by the broad lagoons
With hoodwink mask and domino,
Where cupolas like cuspèd moons
In waters dim reflected glow,
And ghosts of stately frigatoons
In dusky waters come and go.

Sing of romantic palaces
In cities set by gilded seas,
Slenderly mimicking in waves
The lace of spires and balconies,
The oriels and the architraves,
—Dreams! dreams! where lead such dreams as
these?

* IN SYRIA

I KNOW, I know, that even at this hour
When winds blow softer and the sun gains power
In that dim island of the northern seas,
Down in the woodland wakes the early flower.

There in a sodden autumn when the last
Red leaf hung shivering in November's blast,
Scillas I planted, and anemones,
And knew them safe though skies were overcast.

And now though all the drifts of Lebanon
Are mine, and by Orontes wings the swan,
And all the hills put on a flowered coat,
My heart is sick for what I have foregone:

The first uprising of the woodland mould;
The first green blade; the first, the secret fold
Of green leaves under brown; the thrush's note
When the pale sunshine makes him overbold.

For though the summer brings her myriad sweets,
And at the turn when May with April meets
I shall see England,—still the startled spring
Is dearer than the summer's crown of feats.

IN SYRIA

Though April promise but what June fulfils,
Dearer than roses are the daffodils.
Who would not grudge one April on the wing,
And long for England, on the Syrian hills?

DAMASCUS, *April* 1927

*PALMYRA

THIS is the street of a hundred golden columns,
But the pavement is of sand;
Sand of the desert, a white, a wind-blown
Forgotten strand.

These are the columns that were raised by Arabs,
Arabs who had heard of Rome;
But the wild bees hang in the arches to build
Their honey-comb.

Sand of the desert has blown and silted
Half a column high;
Now no longer the proud Odenathus
Goes riding by.

Only a caravan of laden camels
Slouching with noiseless pad,
Goes stringing out at dawn on the desert
Towards Baghdad.

1927

*THE ARAB

ACROSS the desert at the hour of noon
He loped, looking for tracks he might interpret:
The rider of the black stallion, and the sandalled
slaves.

At the hour when a saddle covers a man's whole
shadow

And the buzzards rise with slow unfrighted eagles,
He loped, dragging his camel on a rope,
Following ruts where Roman carts had passed
Trundling the porphyry.

He saw such tracks of wealth; but with the dusk
He took his frugal meal from the saddle-pack,
And crouched with his camel underneath a boulder,
Poor, and his camel mangy, but content.

He knew no envy of the stallion's rider;
Porphyry less to him than ass's milk.

He knew that at the narrow passage waited
No brother and no friend, but inly knew
That laughter follows fresh on every weeping,
And that despair's a veil to many hopes.

1930

LÉBLÉBIDJI.¹ (CONSTANTINOPLE)

I KNOW so well the busy cries
That echo through the quarter
Till daylight into evening dies
And stars appear in water,
So dear they have become to me,
Léblébidji! léblébidji!

On peaceful English country nights
Their rapid gay succession
And all the sea-reflected lights
Will pass from my possession,
But never from my memory,
Léblébidji! léblébidji!

Past English evening scents and sounds,
Past English church-bells ringing,
The Turkish watchman on his rounds,
The Turkish pedlar singing
Through narrow streets above the sea
“*Léblébidji! léblébidji!*”,

Will surely pierce a ghostly way,
The music underlying,

¹ Little white beans.

LÉBLÉBIDJI. (*CONSTANTINOPLE*)

And in the shades of falling day
As in the distance dying,
A little call will come to me,
“*Léblébidji!*” . . .

1913

THE MUEZZIN. (*CONSTANTINOPLE*)

ABOVE the city at his feet,
Above the dome, above the sea,
He rises unconfined and free
To break upon the noonday heat.

He turns around the parapet,
Black-robed against the marble tower;
His singing gains or loses power
In pacing round the minaret.

A brother to the singing birds
He never knew restraining walls,
But freely rises, freely falls
The rhythm of the sacred words.

I would that it to me were given
To climb each day the muezzin's stair
And in the warm and silent air
To sing my heart out into heaven.

1913

MORNING IN CONSTANTINOPLE

SHE has an early morning of her own,
A blending of the mist and sea and sun
Into an undistinguishable one,
When Saint Sophia, from her lordly throne

Rises above that opalescent cloud,
A shadowy dome and soaring minaret
Visible though the base be hidden yet
Beneath the veiling wreaths of milky shroud,

As some dark Turkish beauty haughtily
Glances above the yashmak's snowy fold.
—Beyond Stamboul's long stretch, a bar of gold
Falls from the sun across the distant sea.

1913

* STORM IN THE MOUNTAINS. (SAVOY)

For Hilda Matheson

THE rags of storm are on the hills;
The gathering dusk is shot with light;
One peak is dark, another bright,
And every vein of valley fills
With wind as on a message sent:
The thunder bruises through the clouds,
And spears of lightning tear the shrouds
Behind the mountains' tattered tent,
But distant still the muted storm
Waiting, like anger, for the spark,
Delays in masses bright and dark,
And drapes with threat the ranges' form,
Yet will not break. Those slatted beams
Stand upright from the mountains' flanks
As laddered for celestial ranks
In tall and misty golden gleams.
Enormous stage, with curtains hung
Of mournful purple in the deeps,
And midnight blue upon the steeps
From ropes of slanting sunlight slung,
And solitude that empty holds
The scarp, the crag, the valleys' cleft,

STORM IN THE MOUNTAINS. (SAVOY)

As though no son of man were left
To stride between the curtains' folds!

The butterflies that fanned the stone
With azure or with speckled wing
Are fled before the shadowing;
A few last fugitives are blown
About the upland meadow's slope
In wild and windy path too frail
To choose a way before the gale,
But still held up on gusty hope,
Unlike the lowly, rooted flowers
That tethered to their fate remain,
Among the grass a painted stain
In sunny or in savage hours,
Such hours as they, familiar, knew
Since first upon a shaping world
The veils of such a storm were furled,
And peaks rose up, and gentians grew.

VAL D'ISÈRE, *July* 1929

* PEACE IN THE MOUNTAINS. (SAVOY)

For Hilda Matheson

SUCH peace is here, it scarcely seems
That in the valley roads are run
Beneath the self-same floods of sun
As drench these pastures and their streams;
Drench them in baths of fluid rays
Poured open from a heavenly sluice
To filter through the hands of Zeus,
Brooking no veil but their own haze.
So falls the light of heaven straight
Upon the green and naked breast
Of pastures by the sun caressed
In smooth serenity elate.
Here moves no life but cropping sheep;
The shepherd to the scythe betaken
Leaves flocks and nibbled turf forsaken
To midday sun and midnight sleep.

So, on these flanks of morning, I
Turn loose my flocks and let them stray;
Send shepherd off to make his hay,
Provision for an angrier sky;
My deputy for sterner age,
The winter of my heart and years,
When the first storm wakes mortal fears,
And yelling winds prophetic rage.

July 1929

* PROVENCE

THIS land where lines of cypress bend
Their crusted darkness to the wind,
And poplars turn their blanching leaves
Protective to the vines and sheaves;
This ashen land of rock and stone,
Austere yet fertile in the sun,
Where lizards flick their tails and run
Into the terraced wall and crack
When goats come down the cobbled track;
This land of oranges and maize,
Of corn and roses in the blaze
Of sun on palace, spire, and dome;
Mistral and mistral, as by chance,
Mix poetry and wind in one;
This land of Gaul and France and Rome,
This southern France, this Roman France,
Where castles, scowling each at each
Across the broad green river's reach
Scowl vainly, since the waters dance
Between, and flout hostility,—
Ah, never though the north-wind blow
And blood in the arena flow,
Shall die this southern sanity.

Oh northern mists of doubt and fear,
You are not here, you are not here.

*THE QUARRYMAN. (*LES BAUX*)

SURLY, the generations sent him out,
Climbing a path as stony as his life,
Through valleys aromatic in the drought
With thyme and lavender among the boulders;
The fierce sun dried his shirt upon his shoulders,
And in his pocket warmed the clasped knife.

But in the quarries underneath the hill
The shadow bent its knee across the portal;
The sun died instantly in sudden chill,
And in the catacombs of tunnelled stone
The candid chips lay strewn as fleshless bone,
And candid shelves awaited urns immortal.

He dumped his saw, his mattock, and his pick;
He dumped his bundle on a handy ledge;
And then by his prepared arithmetic
Spat on his palms and fell to work begun
On similar mornings when the thwarted sun
Into the shadowed pylon drove its wedge.

He laboured, never raising eye from line;
One block completed cost him twenty days;
He gave his life to an unseen design,
Sculptor of mountains while he thought to carve

THE QUARRYMAN. (*LES BAUX*)

A living, that his children should not starve,
And with the sunset clattered down his ways.

He laboured at his subterranean craft,
Not seeing that the white, square temple rose,
Roofed over by a mountain, apse and shaft
Deep-driven, pillared into ivory halls,
Luminous galleries and virgin walls,
Unfinished altars, white as drifted snows.

Through the soft limestone hissed the rhythmic saw;
The stone was hard without, but soft within,
As he, whose hard exterior hid the flaw
Of softness prey to ignorance and doubt;
How grey, how beaten by the years without,
How white, how tender when the tests begin!

New shapes, new planes, undreamed by architect;
An accidental beauty, born of need;
Beauty of angles, vertical, erect,
And monolithic as a sea-cut cave
Where the withdrawal of the millionth wave
Leaves the smooth surface when the tides recede.

To what new god he left it dedicate,
This straight new temple lit by crookèd day,
The smokeless altars, and the height elate,
The slabs for sacrifice, the mounting stairs,
The naves and transepts risen unawares,
The sunlight and the shadow, who shall say?

*THE TEMPLE OF LOVE. (*LES BAUX*)

To put a circle round the courts of Love,
I need but slip a ring upon your finger,
And swear,—brown earth beneath, blue skies above,
In vineyards where the latened clusters linger,—
That I will love you till this you, this I,
Give our dear flesh to worm or else to ash,
Rotting in earth or smoking to the sky,
When Death, at last, brings down his scarlet slash.

Such easy uses whispered in your ear
Reach you as lovers' threadbare vows perhaps,
And yet, perennial as the vintage here,
They hold their truth beyond such brief collapse,
Lifting me to the realms where constant are
The dark companion and incertain star.

1931

* DAWN. (*LES BAUX*)

WHAT archer shot that arrow through my panes?
A huntress moon that flees the hunter day,
Or hunter day that masculine arraigns
His right above his Cynthia's soft affray?
An arrow in my heart; I am transfixed;
A bow in heaven snapped; the arrow sticks;
My window widens; Phoebus in pursuit
Chases a Cynthia wan and dissolute.

1931

DALMATIA

. . . So we slid between the islands on a ragged
golden sea,
Nameless islands, sea-locked havens, free of trade
or husbandry,
Sharp with thyme and woolly sage and stunted
rosemary.

There perhaps Venetian lovers found a refuge long ago
Where the curly breakers whiten and the cleanly
spices blow,
And the humble herbs among the boulders creep and
grow.

Blue and gold the evening islands: golden rocks the
sunset flamed;
Insubstantial clouds of islands, floating fabulous,
unnamed,
Peaks of mountain-ranges piercing through the sea
unclaimed.

Ah, were they, the twilight islands that we, drifting,
saw afar,
Sea-girt, hung beneath the single sequin of the early
star,
Lovely to a distant vision, dreams of Alnaschar?

RAGUSA, 1921

* SANS SOUCI

HERE, where the curious vulgar strut and walk,
Gazing at statuary with eyes as blind,
Once strolled a king, and comfort found in talk
For his despotic and unhappy mind.

His greyhounds at his heels, his pointed nose
Beneath the wedge of his three-cornered hat;
Cackling with bullying mischief as he goes,
Tapping his snuff-box, giving tit for tat,

Sceptres forgotten, kingship in suspense,
And ceremony waived (though lapse be brief,)
He seeks in logic, argument, and sense
A cold and intellectual relief.

POTSDAM, *August* 1928

* IN NEW ENGLAND

For Mina Curtiss

WHEN I was sick of voices, cities, trains,
You took me to your farm among the woods,
And let me wander down your muddy lanes
Alone, while you were looking at your goods.

Your men came slouching round you; "May I speak
To you a minute?" and I heard you give
Orders about the timber for next week,
And say they might replace the broken sieve.

Quietly in command, and competent,
You dealt with matters of your shuttered home,
While I, thinking of mine and all it meant
To me, the stranger here, was free to roam.

Earth and not pavement lay beneath my feet;
The anger of a dozen rushing brooks
Replaced the clamour of a city street
And vapid endless talk of books, books, books.

Your dogs came with me; on your farmyard roof
The pigeons cooed in January sun.
Scraping the cobbles with a restive hoof
Your hunter whinneyed at you for a run.

IN NEW ENGLAND

And by some transference of thought and space
Three thousand miles were shrunk, and I saw
Dogs, pigeons, horses, in another place
Submitted to the same and quiet law.

Kent, and not Massachusetts, was the name
That straightway leapt, a child into my arms,
And oh! how simply, durably the same
This good, this pious life on country farms!

NORTHAMPTON, MASSACHUSETTS,
January 1933

•

* MIDDLETON PLACE, SOUTH CAROLINA

STAND I indeed in England? Do I dream?
Those broken steps, those grassy terraces,
Those water-meadows and that ample stream,
Those woods that take the curve of distances,
Those still reflections mirrored in the faint
And milky waters under milky skies
That Constable might paint,
Do they indeed but cheat my heart, my eyes,
With their strange likeness to the thing they
seem?

Tricked at each turn by nature's difference
Englishmen came, and cut their English shapes
Out of the virgin forest and the dense
Tangle of branches loaded with wild grapes;
Pointing their axis to the river's bend,
Sleepy as Thames. Content as one who finds
An unexpected friend
In alien lands where blood more closely binds,
Rejoiced they at the forced coincidence.

* * * * *

MIDDLETON PLACE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Look closer; never in an English glade
Flashed scarlet wings, nor grew the northern larch
In onyx pools as here the cypress staid;
Nor flamed the azalea in an English March
Down paths of fallen petals, aisle on aisle;
Nor climbed the tall liana to the sun,

Nor squatted near a pile
Of oranges, their morning labour done,
That group of negroes idle in the shade;

Nor from the branches hung the parasite
Of greybeard moss bewitching ancient trees,
Blowing aslant through ilex-woods at night
In pointed cobwebs streaming on the breeze;
Singular veils of spectral nameless plot,
The unrelated symbol of a spell

Once potent, now forgot;
Some lost mythology of woods where dwell
The shorn and lockless spirits shunning light.

Pensive within its evening of decay
The garden slopes towards the river-reaches;
Deepens the sunset of the southern day
In sombre ilexes and coral peaches.
No England! but a look, an echoing tone
Such as may cross the voice of distant kin,

Caught briefly, swiftly flown,
Different in resemblance, held within
A heart still mindful of the English way.

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA,
April 1933

*THE AQUARIUM, SAN FRANCISCO

MANY a curious mortal have I seen,
Some bald, some hairy, dwarfish, tall, fat, lean;
And some who sought for gold, and some who sought
At second-hand for other people's thought,
And some who sought for nothing on this earth
But how to pass the time twixt death and birth,
And many with their passions and their pranks,
But none so strange as these who came in tanks
From some Pacific atoll of the main
To swim behind a milky opal pane,
Stared at, but never staring back again.

Lengthen imagination to assent
To these conceits that Nature did invent;
Extravagant and freakish holiday
When on an impulse tropical and gay
(Shaking herself from obligation free,)
Nature upset her paint-box in the sea.
A sudden fling of wit, a giddy quirk,
A respite from the solemn serious work
Of making pink, unornamental men,
Forbears of banker and of citizen.

Within that wet, that other element
Sufficient to itself, as different

THE AQUARIUM, SAN FRANCISCO

From sapient life as dream-deluded sleep,
(Life in a prism, luminously deep,) Content to Be, without a question why,
With gaping gill and lidless open eye,
With frolic fin by waving streamers draped,
Thin as a coin, fantastically shaped,
Fresh as a toy, and sinuous as an imp,
Tiny and exquisite beyond the scrimp
Imagination of a human poet
Who can't devise a thing unless he know it
Already fixed and ready to his pen,
A docketed and handy specimen,
These fish, I say, though fish sound bloodless, cold,
With unreality all rigmaroled,
Now striped, now stippled, speckled, shot, and
starred,
Pied, painted, dappled, boneless, brindled, barred,
Slim, thoughtless, free and finite, water-wise,
Single and speechless though in shoals they rise
Within the prisoned freedom of the glass,
Between the coral and the reeds they pass.

And some, less arrowy and less gymnastic,
But in their lethargy no less fantastic,
Stalk-eyed and mailed, malevolently slow
As some antennaed, armèd daimio,
Crawl horny on the floor of silver-sand,
And to defend their corner of that strand
Fight with stiff joints and chelate nipper claws
Against the slow transgressor of their laws.

COLLECTED POEMS

And some, less sinister and much less big,
—Sea-horses, looped and pensive on a sprig,
Mindful of currents that will never come
Here in their tank to bear them far from home,—
With still philosophy accept their lot,
Submissive victims of a human plot;
A plot to frame them all within a square
Neatly supplied with bubbles of fresh air.

Was it for this that Nature lost her wish
To make a man, and made, instead, a fish?

1933

* SEA-SONNET

WE have forgot, who safe in cities dwell,
The waters that a labouring planet bore;
Forgot to trace in their primeval lore
The shapeless epochs fluted to a shell.
Their old chaotic voices chronicle
The first confusion, and the dark, before
The first adventurer with spear and oar
Towards the unknown pushed out his coracle.

Yet, to the requiem of a dying earth,
When man has passed, his fever and his pride,
Still shall the constellations find a grave
In that Pacific whence the moon had birth,
And that same moon shall heap the desolate tide
Beneath the night's unchanging architrave.

1927

PEOPLE

* REDDIN

THIS was the vision of a night I spent
Anchored off Cáttaro, beneath the tent
Spangled with Adriatic stars; a night
Outwardly calm, but rich and rash within,
Finally wrought to shapelier discipline
And symbol of an unsubstantial land
That once I fashioned, populated, planned,
All in my heart, but never knew its name
And never thought to see.

By ship I came,
Threading between the cliffs, a narrow way,
A passage of the sea, that straitly lay
Cleaving the land, and led to broadening roads
Spread at the foot of hills, in still lagoons
Sheeted to mirror the returning moons
Of looping centuries; a land-locked bay,
Where shuttered palaces with rampant hedge
Of oleander clung upon a ledge
Above the glassy water, in decay
Still green and still Venetian; but my heart
Was taken by the mountains, high, apart,
Watching the little business of the coast,
—Illyrian pirates and Venetian boast
Yesterday, and the fussing steamers of to-day,
One and the same,—the mountains, dim and grave,

COLLECTED POEMS

Watching the water roll its land-locked wave
To lap against the granite of the quay.

That was a gulf, an inlet of the sea,
Cupped among mountains like a crater's mouth,
Too high to grant the sun from east or south
Passage; upon the waters light was spread
Only in those brief hours while overhead
High strode the sun, like an exalted eye
Looking on men, their business, and their pride.
But shadow crept across the mountain-side
Even as noon tolled out on city clock;
The light upon the waters dulled and died;
Only one peak with one great salient rock
Still kept the light, and stabbed a purple sky.

All else was dark. The darker islands lay
Bruising the water by the narrow way;
The sulky coast-line coiled its serpent shape
Down by the water, coloured as a grape;
The lavender flanks rose up, with scrub and stone,
Up, till the peak of Lovcen soared alone
Out-topping others, in the ring of peaks
Above the harbour and the little creeks;
Lovcen, that tragic height, with jutting cliff
Threatening the harbour and the fishing-skiff
With ruin, if the boulder, like a wild
Force to captivity unreconciled,
Should break its bonds, and on the sleeping town
One night in havoc thunder hurtling down.

REDDÍN

On such a rock Prometheus hung in chains,
Lit by the lightning, streaming with the rains
That coursing down his chest and hollow side
Made bronze of naked Titan crucified;
Bronze, gleaming in the night by flashes riven,
A tortured image, hung 'twixt earth and heaven,
Rather than man; on the Caucasian rock
In lifted solitude, where vultures mock,
And circling in the air with raucous cry
Scream at the sacrifice that may not die.
So hung Prometheus, he that dared aspire
To snatch for mortals the celestial fire,
Bolder than Eve; first of the fellowship
Raiding for knowledge, whom the eagles rip,
Eagles of Jove, or eagles of the soul.

But there aloft hung no tormented form.
Mountain and rock rose lonely to the storm,
Untenanted. I dreamt, upon the deck,
Of winter midnights, when the tempest's wreck
Should tear the sky to rifts of silver light
And chasing clouds, in turmoil of the night;
The moon unveiled by wind, through scurrying star
Sharp as the blade-edge of a scimitar
Cleaving a curtain; nights I had not seen,
For now the evening sky stretched deep, serene,
There behind Lovcen, as a cloth of blue,
Deep, virgin blue; yet nights I never knew,
Wild, dangerous, mountain nights, my spirit held,
(As to the desperate temper force-compelled);

COLLECTED POEMS

The tortured Titan and the loosened gale
Were to my spirit rather spur than flail,
Stirring me deeply to a mood so tense
It seemed I doubly lived through every sense,
Not troubled, not exalted, but alert,
Keyed to the sombre influence that girt
That place about, and made of it a den
Where legends such as frighten ignorant men
Are born of Nature in barbaric dress,
Making of man on earth a nothingness,
A passing, a distraction, an empty noise,
A traveller pressed for time, a brawling voice
Breaking against impassive solitudes.
Nature's revenges are of Nature's moods,
Stern, ominous, and shut to charity;
The harshest law, the utmost penalty
Is her exaction; let who know it, speak!
There, swung between the water and the peak,
Crushed by the hills, that silent stood like tall
Savages, I knew fear, but still withal
Felt strength in me, to take and to control
That darkly-moving influence, that soul
Of place, to my own purpose; more: I felt
It mine already, as if I had dwelt
Long years and secretly on that dark coast,
Learning each shade, each feature; knowing most
The peak and its companion rock, my own,
And all the epic of that lonely throne;
And as from deck I stared aloft, there stirred
Almost a recognition, (though I heard

REDDÍN

Only the water lapping at the side,
And on the quay a waft of song that died,)
A sense that I had seen that place before.

The mountains, and the half-light, and the shore;
The water, and the silence, and the calm.
The opening chords of some tremendous psalm
Swelled on the air, for my sole secret hearing,
Like echoes from some deeper distance nearing,
That, hill to hill, dully reverberate.
Then grew their harmonies to my tense state
Intelligible, in a single hymn
Concordant as the shout of seraphim
To ears of faith; till final and complete,
Like thunder rolled round Lovcen's cloudy seat,
This tale of Reddín and his temple grew.

Whence came that name, Reddín, I never knew.
His image long had wandered in my mind
Persistent, far removed from human-kind,
Yet, in his wisdom, gentle, mild, and sure.
A master-builder, in retreat obscure,
Dwelling upon the shores of such a sea,
(Where are the fishing-boats of Galilee?)
With young disciples, packed in eager brood
Jealous to match the concentrated mood
That burnt Reddín. I saw him speak and move;
I knew the falsehoods he would disapprove;
I knew his gesture, and his intimate ways

COLLECTED POEMS

As one whom I had followed all my days;
He was as sure to me as native speech,
Knowledge inborn, with nothing more to teach;
Each involution, each intricacy
Was native knowledge radical in me;
I knew his semblance: he was small and spare;
His twinkling eyes were blue; his smile was rare;
His flanks were lean, but muscular, and strong;
He wore a shirt, tight-belted with a thong;
Old? by the superstitious credited
With years enough to carve a river-bed;
His speech was coarse; he liked good jokes and wine;
Would give six Josephs for one libertine;
And never spoke the secret in his breast
Save in the irony of caustic jest,
But, in such frivolous guise, would drop a word
That grew and echoed after it was heard,
Richer in meaning than the heavy saw
Of men who, ill-advised, approached with awe
The presence of Reddín, and looked to find
Portentous sermon, axiom well-defined,
But met instead a shrewd and liberal wit
That left no place for prig or hypocrite,
Yet like the breath of wind across a lake
Blew the stale doubt away, and vapid ache.

Those who would hear the answer of Reddín,
—Disturbing, reassuring, wild, serene?—
Must seek it, not from him, but from the mute
Eloquence of his temple, and salute

REDDÍN

Not one old craftsman's perishable frame,
But in his monument a giant's name.

The work is ever greater than the man,
So said Reddín; he shall conceive and plan,
Yes, he shall execute and hew and shape,
But something not his own shall still escape
Beyond intention and beyond control,
Synthetic miracle that welds the whole.

Yet may that synthesis be seen alone
By him that formed it out of words or stone,
A clue thrown out, a cipher-written hint
Of what one man with his peculiar squint
Caught as the earth upon a slanted axis
Rolled in obliquity and parallaxis;
A unity to curious focus slipped;
A personal reading of ambiguous script.
So said Reddín, and fooled the crude unwise
Who had not looked within his twinkling eyes;
Who had not read the purpose in the jest,
And thought that truth unphrased was truth un-
guessed.

Then in my vision Lovcen's peak, divorced
From earthly station, and superbly forced
Into my legendary world, obeyed
My wishes. Re-created, newly-made,
That leonine altitude upon its mane
Reared to a mass of masonry, a fane

COLLECTED POEMS

Bright against heaven, complex as a faith,
Yet pure and final as the cold of death.
This was the temple of Reddín: no creed
Inspired its ordinance, no temporal need
Of visible threat had poised it on the cliff,
But one man's art in one man's hieroglyph,
A signature in blocks of stone scrawled high,
A declaration signed across the sky.
All those might walk, who dared the steep
ascent,

Dwarfed beneath architrave and pediment,
Wondering, (as men wonder at the great
Ruins of temples built for God and State,)
What piety or blasphemy designed
This tabernacle of a master-mind?
Was it in sacrilege or in belief
That Reddín raised a cliff upon a cliff?
Was it in mockery or reverence
He piled his lapidary eloquence?
Was it in worship or iconoclasm
That Reddín hung a temple on a chasm?

So strange that place; no ark of trite religion
Offering perch and nest to timid pigeon
Wherein security might croon, and all
Danger be hidden, sheltered by a wall;
Responsibility on others cast,
And present science smothered by the past.
So strange that place! its airy terraces
Compelled each man to new geographies;

REDDÍN

Compelled each man to find his way anew
Round corners and by paths that no guide knew,
Yet wearing all the semblance of a haven
Prepared on earth to ape the courts of heaven.
Apse, nave, and transept, in familiar range
Lulled the suspicious heart, mistrusting change;
Apse, nave, and transept, orthodox design,
Rose spacious on that ledge of travertine,
As honey-coloured as a Grecian noon,
A great cathedral on the peak,—but soon
Pilgrim and wanderer alike discerned
A difference disquieting, and learned
That this great gesture spelt a great disdain:
A tabernacle for the free profane.

No vision of the martyr or the saint
Shone down from domed mosaic or flat paint,
Such as men's eyes for usual comfort sought,
And finding nothing turned away distraught;
No priest in chasuble with pearls inwrought
Bowed to a Host within a lighted shrine,
Or chanted paradox in Latin line;
No mumblings fell, through lattices, on ears
That bigger grew, and greedier, with the years;
No voice from lectern or from pulpit brayed
With garbled messages and stale tirade;
No tribal wanderings or local sect
Were made the pattern of a God's Elect,
Their crimes glossed over and their sins ignored,
Since they were held the Chosen of the Lord;

COLLECTED POEMS

No threats of Hell, no bribery of Heaven,
To the devout alternately were given;

But all was silence. All might walk alone,
Free to their choice, through transepts sprung of
stone,

Through silent cloisters and through hollow crypt.
His own interpretation of the script
Apocryphal each man might read; or, gaping,
Go elsewhere to pursue the truth escaping,
Reddín no prophet who would all compel
One road to Heaven and one road to Hell,
But one who offered carelessly, and flouted
Alike the creed accepted and the doubted.
For he who chose to linger there and ask
What secret features hid behind the mask,
Received no answer from the quiet air,
Only a sign that all were welcome there,
Since the great doors stood open, and the breeze
Wandered between the colonnades; the bees
Built up their architecture, little brothers;
The nesting doves flew in and out; and others,
The humble donkey and satyric goat,
The hunted leveret and the slinking stoat,
Took refuge; padding paw and clicking hoof
Strayed in beneath the shelter of the roof,
And none were driven forth, but, rather, they
Found food prepared: a manger of sweet hay,
A pool of grain thrown down, an apple sliced,
And by such soft persuasions half enticed

REDDÍN

They passed the word to the surrounding hills
Where nature always threatens, often kills,
That here was respite, here a strange return,
Necessity's sharp lesson to unlearn;
So men, here-climbing from the world of men,
(A kingdom's slave, republic's citizen,)
Met fresh and equal, prejudice ashamed,
Justice, so-called, contemned, and codes unframed,
And thought flew free, a prisoned bird released
Out of the hand of censor, judge, and priest.

Then, as I followed weaving up the tale,
I heard the angry rumours grow and rail
Against this man who dared to write so high
A parable the stubborn might deny
But all must fear, and no man might ignore.
The pilgrims of the world came more and more,
Drawn by the licence of this riteless creed
Where neither man nor dogma should impede
The loose communion of the soul with God;
Where golden sandals or poor feet unshod
Might tread alike upon the marble stair;
Where silence was as welcome as a prayer,
And meditation spread her shadows deep
Wherein belief might waken, doubt might sleep,
With beauty for the only Absolute.
I heard resentful voices persecute
Reddín and his intolerable flaunt:
Intolerable, thus in stone to taunt
The smug hypocrisy through years evolved

COLLECTED POEMS

By timid dwarfs of men, their fears resolved!
Intolerable, grandly thus to shatter
Ingenious maxims to a dusty scatter!
Intolerable, thus to launch a free
Sarcastic challenge at safe sophistry!

Thus grew the tide, and heaped a curling threat
That soon would topple to its flood, and yet
Reddín with quiet smile and lifted hand
Reproved the warnings of his little band.
“Let be,” he said, “though fools and cowards
bawl.

Who tilts at folly will by folly fall.
I am content to go, if go I must,
And with the powdered marble mix my dust;
Better,” he said, “in such a way to die
Than live ignored by man’s indifferent eye;
Better to fall with such reverberation
That nation looks aghast across to nation;
But if I go, and perish with the stone,”
—He held them with his eyes,—“I go alone.”

None knew the sources of his prescience.
None heard the whisper of that imminence,
But with the instinct of a migrant bird
The old Reddín divined, (as though he heard
Death calling from afar,) and on an eve
When nature hushed, suspended in reprieve,
He left his friends, he started for the height.
They saw him dwindle in the failing light,

REDDÍN

But none dared follow; as a docile hound
That at a word sinks crouching to the ground,
They watched him go, (and I upon the deck
Gazed upwards till his form became a speck
Climbing the zigzag goat-paths of the hill
Towards his temple that at sunset still
Caught the last lovely light, a golden city
Which in its pride transcended trivial pity,
And in its glory left me little room
To mourn its maker or lament its doom;)
They watched him go, and I too watched him go,
—Inventor of the whole imagined show,—
Since a fatality had matched the hour
Equal with its destruction, and his power.

Silence had fallen over land and sea.
The waves scarce kissed the shore of Calvary.
Reddín climbed upward to his final tryst,
Matching in loneliness the path of Christ.
No cross of cypress-wood his shoulders bowed;
He went in freedom from a hooting crowd;
But, heavier than any wooden cross,
More deadly than the grappled albatross,
He bore the burden of a mind forlorn
As that whose symbol was the crown of thorn;
The burden of enlightenment, with scorn
Mistrustfully rejected, treacherous gift!
Mankind in self-protection slashes swift,
And heavier than any cross of wood,
Misrepresented and misunderstood,

COLLECTED POEMS

Bearing his wisdom and his failure both,
Reddín went upward by his lonely path.

And fanged revenge around the harbour snarled,
Against that enemy of a settled world,
That preacher contrary to vested codes,
That ranger, scornful of the civic roads.
Around the harbour, on the sunset's breath,
"Reddín!" crept coupled with the name of death.
I knew the inarticulate mob would swarm
That night, and cluster for the threatened storm;
I knew the knots of men upon the quays
Would gather to a horde like swarming bees;
I knew the snarl would strengthen to a shout;
I knew, before the morning light could gleam,
Reddín would lie in ruins with his dream.

I waited; one by one the stars came out;
Each little window showed its yellow lamp.
The shuffling footsteps hardened to a tramp
As in the darkness some command was given.
Then, high against the black and spangled heaven,
A light sprang out, as sudden as a cry,
A torch, a beacon blazing in the sky,
A challenge to the dark horizons flung
Up where Reddín's cathedral dimly hung
Beneath the firmament's inverted cup;
And with that light an angry roar went up
In answer, and a storm of trampling feet
Burst on the mountain from the city street.

REDDÍN

Over the rocks, a rabble thousands strong,
Singing stupidity's great battle-song,
They stumbled, bearing torches in their hands,
Branches of pine, and other flaming brands.

Their progress tokened by a line of fire
They struggled up towards the waiting pyre
Whose solitary light burnt steady, clear,
Denial of surrender or of fear.
And inch by inch, and foot by foot, unreined
By driving passion, ardently they gained
The platform where the first great terrace spread,
And paused to see the towering overhead
Of spire and buttress massed against the stars,
—Red Betelgeuse, blue Rigel, ruddy Mars,—
Then with the hate that does as love exalt,
Flung themselves forward to a last assault.

The mountain-peak with thorns of flame was
crowned,
Briars that ran and leapt along the ground,
Kindling to spears and circles of fresh fire
That ringed the cupola and reached the spire.
The sound of blows fell heavy on the night
Daemonic as the spurts of scarlet light;
And shapes of men with lifted weapons ran,
In semblance more like demon than like man,
Flitting as dark as goblins round the blaze
In savage resolution to erase
The dangerous autograph Reddín had signed

COLLECTED POEMS

In letters unfamiliar to mankind;
All should go down in havoc, flames, and smoke;
No trace should stand of that audacious stroke
Scored against humbug, cant, and cowardice;
Sunrise should leave no stone on stone of this
Preposterous acropolis!

Prophet and martyr, where is your defence?
You dared the world with loathed intelligence.
Did you not know that none may hope for ruth
Who show the world the Gorgon head of truth?
Proud fool of wisdom, could you never learn
By compromise men's confidence to earn?
Could you not learn to wheedle and cajole
Into security man's frightened soul?

I trembled; and the ship beneath me stirred.
Was it a whispered portent that I heard,
Shivering round the outline of the coast,
Ruffling the water, sprung from innermost
Mysterious Earth, where fiery dangers seethe
And in reminder through volcanoes wreathe?
Was it a wrinkling of the dragon's skin
Aroused by rage without to rage within?
An answer snarled by an enormous beast
To puny passions on her flanks released,
Where little men in anger hopped and howled?
Earth in her slumber turned, and surly growled,
And the first rumbling of the earthquake passed
Rocking the vessel through from keel to mast,

REDDÍN

Slanting the stars in brief, appalling tilt,
A warning, and a censure on men's guilt,
A sign that Earth, awaking in the void,
Might hurl destroyers after the destroyed.

Still, though the veil of heaven might be rent
And stars be tilted in the firmament,
And Earth lie over with unnatural list,
Still came no cooling cry, "Desist! desist!"
Hot with their fury the attackers sprang
And on the marble blocks the mattocks rang,
Nobility by envious iron defaced,
Philosophy by common minds abased.
The fine, the rare, the lovely, all went down
In fire and tumult on the mountain's crown,
Burning its great tiara to the stars,
And once again Earth shivered through the
spars,
And on the peak the incandescent pile
Rocked in its ruined walls from spire to aisle,
Falling, and crushing in repeated fall
The blackened vandals clustered on the wall.
No need for mattock now, no need for brand;
By swirling winds the pointed flames were fanned,
And streamed like pennants all about the fane,
Blown to a furnace by the hurricane,
And toppling tower and belfry in collapse
Sank through the opened roofs of nave and apse,
Heaping their wreckage on the paving stones,
With cries of men and breaking of men's bones,

COLLECTED POEMS

And molten lead like lava in slow flood
Stained its grey river with red coils of blood.

Tense through the night I stared with sleepless eye
While this fulfilment of my dream went by,
But had some mortal told me that I dreamed,
I should have answered that he but blasphemed.
For what's my dream? since I myself may be
Some vaporous figment in infinity,
A thought within another mind conceived,
And in my thinking doubly thus deceived?
What's truth or lies, if it be truth to me?

I heard the marble rend, I heard the crack
Of toppling walls upon the earthquake's track;
I heard the loosened boulder hurtle down
To crush the stupid evil of the town;
I heard revenge in just and natural path
Sweep up the crime as folly's aftermath;
I knew the body of Reddín was lost
In general carnage with the storming host.

1926-28

•

* A DREAM

DOWN the long path beneath the garden wall,
She stooped, setting her plants in the winter dusk.
She knew she must make an end of setting her plants,
Though why she must make an end she nothing
knew.

Was it the end of the year that made her urgent?
Was it the end of the day? for night came down,
And the heavy sky grew black above the wall,
And the trees were quiet in a stillness worse than
storm

As the great white stealthy flakes began to fall,
But still she stooped with her trowel, setting her
plants.

And the ground grew white with the imperceptible
drift

Of the silent snow from a black and loaded heaven,
And candles came around her, stuck in silver;
Candelabra of silver, with horns of flame,
Burning the snow to a ruddy glow as she set
The fragile year's-end plants of her dying hopes.

But the candles failed to mount with the mounting
snow;

The silver bases and then the silver stems

COLLECTED POEMS

Were buried under the drift, and the drift invaded
The very candles and stems of tender wax,
So that the flames alone remained above the snow,
But the flames persisted, travelling as she travelled,
And the snow touched them not, nor melted they
the snow.

Then came the fallow deer with delicate steps,
Printing their steps around her as she stooped,
And their antlers burned with little flames at the tip,
Little daggers of gold at every point,
Pricket and sorel and buck, and the doe with her
fawn.

And she knew that she neared the end of the garden
path,
And the deer and the buried candles travelled with
her,
But still she knew that she would not make an end
Of setting her plants before the shroud came round
her.

1931

*

* ENCOUNTER

HE walked alone at dusk in the snow-bound woods.
He walked, alone, at dusk, in the powdered woods,
His footprint dark on the snow, and his figure
dark

As it slipped through the powdered trees beneath the
moon;

His slim black velvet figure chained in gold.
And in his hand he carried a shining trap,
For he loved the Queen, and sought the northern
ermine

To lie on her breast as soft as fallen snow.
But when he came to the pines as dark as he,
And bent to fix his trap in the sandy soil,
A grave white fox came up to watch his business,
A freak of nature, white as he was dark,
And the fox and the stripling looked at one another
Till the little ermines ran about in the moon,
For the shining trap lay cast as an icicle
Dripped from an idle freshet in the frost.
And the ferns stood up, that were dead and stilly
frozen

Into a fronded crispness above the leaves;
They stood, that had been unfurled as bishops'
croziers

Smithied in the green furnace of the spring.

COLLECTED POEMS

But the youth in his black, with golden links of
chain,
And the fox in his freakish snowy coat of fur,
Looked in each other's eyes while ermines ran,
And the youth forgot his queen and the fox his vixen
In the silent searching look of beast and man.

1931

*SPINSTER

SHE played her game of chess, alone, when day was
done;

So solitary, that she played alone,
Finding no friend to be her adversary.
So she made reckoning against herself,
Pondering over black and scarlet checks
So square, so motley in their strange convention,
Bright as the pattern on a herald's tabard,
And stylised as the King and Queen of Spades.
She cupped her chin in lamplight, as the checks
Developed each their own complexity:
Oblation of the sacrificial pawn,
Antics of equine, freakish, leaping knight,
And sly episcopal obliquity;
The rush of reckless queens, the sour retreat
Of kings behind a slavish rash defence,
And general scheme with falsely-neat relation
To life denied her simple scope of grasp.

1931

* COLLOQUY

*“FRIEND, whomsoever you be,
Open to me your door.
Dark to the storm are the pines,
Rough the paths of the moor.*

*Heavily-dragging my limbs,
Wearily-shod my feet.
Make me free of your hearth,
In the smoke of the peat.”*

*“Fugitive out of the moor,
Fire, and my hunch of bread
Are yours; you shall rest your limbs,
Bracken shall pillow your head.*

*Stranger, I shall not ask
Where be your staff, your horse;
Whether the blood on your hands
Was drawn from you by the gorse.”*

*“Stags on a bed of bracken
Couch them the stars beneath;
Leap away with the dawn,
And day brings life, or death.”*

*TO ENID BAGNOLD

THERE was a room, downstairs, where flowers were
bright;

Where floors were parquet, and the shaded light
Diffused (discreet) from urns of alabaster;
A room for neither mistress nor for master;
An immobility of frozen order
With footman and with housemaid for its warder;
Where nothing stirred, and nothing claimed its life,
But all was tidy; right; remote from strife;

Where neither pipe nor novel, both thrown down
In haste to obey the calling of the town,
Disturbed the settled, brown cosmogony
Disposed on tables of mahogany;
A room where no one came except for meeting
Within the formulae of social greeting;
A room where all was spent, in lovely waste,
So exquisitely in the best of taste.

There was a room, upstairs, above the stables,
Fitted with wooden shelves and wooden tables,
And sharpened tools to suit a craftsman's hand.
Bottles of ink, and bottles too of sherry,
Where one might talk or sulk or else make merry
Forgetting both *Serena* and *The Land*;

COLLECTED POEMS

Where one might talk, my dear, till suns had set
Or moons gone down in darkness, and forget
That you were such a brilliant novelist,
Though few and privy (safety first!) might know it
Or smell your name, through pen-names, on a list,
And I, God's truth, a damned out-moded poet.

A room where one might speak the truth (if truth
Were ever, save by silence, to be spoken;)
Where one might play the dear pretence of youth
With no drab lesson learnt, or mirror broken.

There was an eagle, happy in a cage,
(If such a thing might be,) that had forgotten
The crags and storms and ocean's splendid rage,
A free and lonely spirit once begotten;
Now tamed to peck the groundsel through the bars
And to esteem a kindly safe protection
Above the danger of the windy stars.
How gentle are the uses of affection,
The ways of home, so trimmed and yet so tender:
The dear security, the rosy lamp,
The flannels drying on the nursery fender,
The fire that keeps the lions from the camp!

1932

*TESS

LOVE thou but me; all other realms I'll give thee,
Realms of the wind, the starlight, and the rain.
Love the whole natural world, and I'll forgive thee,
If thou but love no mortal limbs again.

So generous am I, I would not stint thee;
I spread the whole of nature for thy choice.
Only, with my own cipher would imprint thee,
That thou should'st answer to my single voice.

Oh then beware! for should'st thou stray or falter
From that high mark my arrogance has set,
Stern as a priest I'll stretch thee on an altar
And in revenge all tenderness forget.

Then when the rising sun makes summer shadow,
I'll take a knife and stretch thee on a stone
Scooped for the blood to soak a Wiltshire meadow,
When dawn and death shall find us there, alone.

1931

* ALICE MEYNELL

HER thought was stone; oh frugal poet, hard
Cut the spare chisel on each separate gem,
Jasper and onyx, emerald and sard,
Blending integrity with stratagem.

* ANNE BOLEYN FORGOTTEN

For a Pageant at Hever Castle

QUIET! she comes. The sunlight quivers
Before the unsubstantial wraith.
The grasses sway, the poplar shivers,
In the prophetic wind of faith.

She comes; the long green path awaits her,
The flowers curtsey for her sake;
The Grecian satyr celebrates her,—
But where's the track she used to take?

Pale as the gauzes of her wimple,
Slight-waisted in her farthingale,
The way she knew is not so simple
Between the castle and the vale.

She hesitates between the hedges,
Grown up since she was borne away;
She wavers on the terraced ledges
That were but slopes in Henry's day.

Poor queen! she learns the tale of changes
Since trees and paths are not the same;
That age of sleep which all estranges
Has left her but a tragic name.

COLLECTED POEMS

Yet trees and paths await her coming,
To erstwhile trees and paths akin;
The very insects hush their humming
To greet the steps of Anne Boleyn.

Only the sense of man unkind
Shuts out the shy bewildered ghost;
Forgets her tremulous reminder
In present fantasies engrossed.

Twice slain beneath this second spurning,
Roused from her sleep, she parts the shrouds;
She takes the unfamiliar turning,
And glides unseen through blinded crowds.

***SELF-EPITAPH, COMPOSED BY AN
HONEST SENSUALIST**

IF I must lie, who never lied in life,
Awaiting Judgment-day,
Then lay me here, to lie as others lay
Often with virgin, prostitute, and wife.

* ABSENCE

No lights are burning in the ivory tower
Like a tall lily in the moonlight risen;
No light, to-night, within the ivory prison.
No golden glow behind the blackened panes
Like golden anthers in a pallid flower;
The gates are looped, to-night, with hasps and chains.
Only the little virgin coldly smiling
With carven finger raised to carven lip
In secrecy beneath the latticed moon
Preserves her secret, keeps her virgin watch
On silvered fields that to the silver heaven
Lie open as the restless summer sea
Crossed by one tall incautious sailing-ship,
Or love to lover generously given.

1931

ON THE STATUE OF A VESTAL VIRGIN
BY TOMA ROSANDIĆ

How slender, simple, shy, divinely chaste,
She wilting stood,
Her suppleness at pause, by leisure graced,
In robes archaic by the chisel woo'd,
That smoothly flowed around her waist
And all her figure traced,
And at her feet in fluid ripples broke;
A Vestal virgin! but she rather seemed
The Hamadryad of the sculpted oak
Since in that oaken raiment she for ever dreamed.

One finger to her lips she raised,
And turned her dubious glances wide
As one who forward to the future gazed,
But her reluctant body swerved away
As one who held her bounty back with pride.
"Forbear!" her hesitation seemed to say,
While her exulting soul for instant capture cried.

And she was ageless; leisure unperturbed
Lay like a light across her brow
And sanctified her vow;
But that uplifted hand from its austerity

COLLECTED POEMS

Another spirit stirred,
The wayward spirit of the pagan tree.

Had she stood dreaming by the water's verge,
Her branches mirrored in the forest pool
Where plashing sunlight flickered and was cool?
Did she so stand
Before the sculptor with his mortal hand
Summoned the mortal maiden to emerge?
And did she open eyes upon a place
All pied and jewelled with the flowers wild,
With king-cups and the pretty daisy mild,
With periwinkle sulking like a child,
And little orchis with his puckered face,
And campion too?
Did these, when first they saw her, race
Around her feet like tiny rivulets?
The bluebells shake for joy? the violets,
Thinking that other Virgin full of grace
Was come amongst them, blush a deeper blue?

Was this her birth upon a world of men,
Where any painter might have seized his hour,
Breathing her swiftly on the canvas then,
Among the lowly flowers a taller flower?
Or any sculptor on the marble limn
Her slenderness serene, her beauty's dower,
Her lifted hand, her smooth and fragile limb,
Learning a greater art from her than she from him?

ON THE STATUE OF A VESTAL VIRGIN

So in the prison of her perfect shape
She dwelt for ever virginal, adored,
Whence she might never know escape,
Might never know what mystery lay stored
Beyond the threshold she might never pass,
But where for ever poised and wavering she was,
Threshold of waking youth, as bright and narrow as
a sword.

FULL MOON

SHE was wearing the coral taffeta trousers
Someone had brought her from Isfahan,
And the little gold coat with pomegranate blossoms,
And the coral-hafted feather fan;
But she ran down a Kentish lane in the moonlight,
And skipped in the pool of the moon as she ran.

She cared not a rap for all the big planets,
For Betelgeuse or Aldebaran,
And all the big planets cared nothing for her,
That small impertinent charlatan,
As she climbed on a Kentish stile in the moonlight,
And laughed at the sky through the sticks of her fan.

MARIANA IN THE NORTH

ALL her youth is gone, her beautiful youth outworn,
Daughter of tarn and tor, the moors that were once
her home
No longer know her step on the upland tracks forlorn
Where she was wont to roam.

All her hounds are dead, her beautiful hounds are
dead,
That paced beside the hoofs of her high and nimble
horse,
Or streaked in lean pursuit of the tawny hare that
fled
Out of the yellow gorse.

All her lovers have passed, her beautiful lovers have
passed,
The young and eager men that fought for her arro-
gant hand,
And the only voice which endures to mourn for her
at the last
Is the voice of the lonely land.

ARIANE

I WISH you thought me faithless, when within
My heart I knew my innocence from sin.

I wish that I might tell you fables blithe
Of my misdeeds, and smile to see you writhe.

This I could bear; I cannot bear that you
Should think me faithful, when I am untrue.

1919

TRIO

So well she knew them both! yet as she came
Into the room, and heard their speech
Of tragic meshes knotted with her name,
And saw them, foes, but meeting each with each
Closer than friends, souls bared through enmity,
Beneath their startled gaze she thought that she
Broke as the stranger on their conference,
And left them as she stole abashed from thence.

1919

EVE

BECAUSE I knew you fickle as the flame
And sweet as music irresponsible,
Because I knew no walls could tame
Your vagrancy within their certain shell,

I raised for you a palace on a hill
Where all the spirits generous and free
Might drift at their unchidden will,
Or tarry to salute you carelessly.

A windy palace most fantastical,
Whose halls stood full of light and resonance,
Where slender fountains lyrical
Spilled water like a stream of bright romance,

And, high above the many spires, I hung
A company of bells; with wanton hands
The happy wind shook out and swung
Their dimpling music over level lands.

1919

EVE IN TEARS

You laughed, and all the fountains of the East
Leapt up to heaven with their diamond rain
To hang in light, and when your laughter ceased
Dropped shivered arrows to the ground again.

You laughed, and from the belfries of the earth
The music rippled like a shaken pool;
And listless banners at the breeze of mirth
Were stirred in harbours suddenly made cool.

You wept, and all the music of the air
—As when a hand is laid upon a bell—
Was stilled, and Dryads of the tossing hair
Crept back abashed within the secret dell.

1919

SCORN

THEY roll, clan by clan, kin by kin, on wide orderly
roads,
Burghers and citizens all, in a stately procession,
Driving before them the wealth of their worldly
possession,
Cattle, and horses, and pack-mules with sumptuous
loads.

In velvet and fur and fat pearls,—rich lustre and
sheen,
Paunches and plenty, and fatuous voices con-
tented
Counting their gain, and their women all jewelled
and scented
Smiling false smiles with the little sharp word in
between.

But those in the by-paths of vagrancy, star-gazers,
they,
Ragged and feckless and young, with no thought
but their singing,
Derisive of gain, and light as the bird in its
winging,
Stopping to kiss or to frolic, the simple and gay,

SCORN

God's fools,—the belovèd of God who made them
and the wind,
Gipsies and wastrels of life, the heedless of warning,
Chasing the butterfly now on the breeze of the
morning,
Laugh at the passing procession that leaves them
behind.

1919

CHINOISERIE. (*VILLANELLE*)

For B. M.

Lotus flowers clustering
Round your feet in storeys laid,
Splendid daughter of a King.

In a graven vase of Ming
Peaches, apricots of jade,
Lotus flowers clustering,

All their scentless riches bring,
All around your throne displayed,
Costly daughter of a King.

What young prince astonishing
Rides along the inky glade,
Lotus flowers clustering

Round his camel travelling?
See the leopards unafraid,
Slender daughter of a King!

Coromandel picturing,
Strangely, marvellously made.
Lotus flowers clustering,

CHINOISERIE. (*VILLANELLE*)

Nightingales that cannot sing,
What celestial escapade
Are they nightly witnessing,
Through lotus flowers clustering,
Subtle daughter of a King?

MAD

"I'LL take my yellow handkerchief,
My coral beads I'll wear;
Green ivy-chains shall loop my dress,
And ivy-chains shall loop my hair.

"What pretty gyves, such pretty gyves!
See how with tendril twists
They twine a halter round my throat
And captives make of both my wrists.

"I'll leave my shoes beside the stream,
And creep on noiseless feet
Between the willows all among
The iris and the meadow-sweet."

She slips from willow-tree to tree,
Holding one finger pressed
Against her lips; her other hand
Lies lightly moulded on her breast,

And peeping, laughing all the day,
She rambles up and down,
But I, unseen, have seen her go
With ivy slung about her gown.

VAGRANT

Was it but a random bird,
Harlequin on breast and wing?
Or through aspens whispering
Was it some rare flute you heard,
That you followed, wandering?

Followed all that onward fled,
Hares and squirrels, bounding roes,
All that through the woodland goes,
Wind that murmurs overhead,
Leaves that scamper, stream that flows?

Straight the pathway you forsook
Tempted by the beckoning
Of the winded poplar's swing,
Tempted by the onward brook,
In pursuit adventuring,

By the bluebell's fleeting drift,
By the splash of light and shade
Down the ride in patterns laid,
By the distant sunshine rift,
Promise of the open glade.

COLLECTED POEMS

There, where they had seen you go,
Those who loved you called your name,
Searching, seeking, to and fro.
True, to answer them you came,
But your eyes were not the same.

A POET SPEAKS

I AM the swift omnipotent magician;
All bounty's in my gift, all songs unsung,
All slumbering chords, all undiscovered crafts
Baffling their premature interpreters;
No law's beyond my searching; I'll condemn
No vice, despise no sorrow, scorn no joy,
Deride no virtue, throw no stone at Pilate,
But sweep my mantle round humanity
And round the pomp of nature; nothing find
Too mean, too great, too little, or too spacious;
Mine be the secrets both of hearts and stars,
(Small, measureless hearts; great, measurable stars;)
And love's old barbarous reiteration
I'll tolerate, and the great self-less peace
Like the deep sea's perpetual repose.

I'll not be parsimonious of my wealth.
I'll fill your heaven with many coloured moons
And hang such variable tides upon them
As strew the astonished fish along the shores.
I'll bring the planets nearer: I'll attract
Saturn within his hoop of shining rings,
And Uranus with rebel satellite;
I'll summon a great conclave of the comets
Which hitherto were strangers to each other,

COLLECTED POEMS

And man, at nightfall standing on the crest
Of a familiar hill, shall marvelling stare
Into an unfamiliar firmament.

I'll dry the seas and bring the unknown lands
To light, that on unchristened continents
Man stray dry-foot from Africa to Asia.
Oh, what new rivers then, what deep, deep lakes,
What caverns and what cliffs, what strange ravines,
What deserts, what denuded leagues of plain,
Shall offer to his swarming multitude!
Peaks shall be islands, islands shall be peaks,
When I reverse the ordering and make
A mountainous Pacific continent,
A Himalayan archipelago.

And all the daily and the lovely things,
—The fawn's late bed of bracken, newly warmed,
The nets of fishermen through water sinking,
Drawn up all hoar with flake of silver scales
And round clear drops that tremble from the mesh,—
These little things, these nimble shy delights,
With the quick magic of significance
I'll not despise to startle into being.

INSURRECTION

INSURRECTION

To A.

I

POOR soul! a captive in a prison-house
 Dreaming of pastures, is not more degraded
 Through rags and shackles and the insidious louse,
 And naked splendour of the body faded,

Than our uneasy spirit, dimly haunted
 By vision of some state, some wisdom whole;
 Prophetic down unhopèd-for distance; taunted;
 Dissentient and disquiet guest, the soul.

II

Would I were done with flesh, or flesh with me,
 —Frailty from frailty seeking prop and stay!—
 Would that from all such trammels I were free,
 Hindered no more by quagmires of the clay,

Then with an energy controlled and fierce
 Might I on greater secrets turn, and fight
 Through with unsheathed and shining weapon;
 pierce
 Through to some wisdom, to some lake of light.

COLLECTED POEMS

A sinewy spirit, muscular and lean,
Should be my captain, striding ever on
Over harsh mountains where the wind blew keen,
Peak after peak, till the last peak was won.

Angry I strive, loving the world I hate,
Hating the flesh I love; but all in vain.
Freed for an hour, then, fall'n from ghostly state,
Sink to the clasp of siren foes again.

III

(Yet much is merry in men's moods diverse.
I am no mystic, I, that I should preach
With lips string-drawn as tight as miser's purse,
Dispense thin wisdom by my scrannel speech;

No, none, thank God, can more have loved good
 laughter,
Beauty, well-being, perilous lottery,
Or paid the reckoning that followed after
With smaller grudge to justice than did I.)

IV

Sometimes I met with one, and would have cried,
"Pilgrim! by the proud manner of your going
Clearly you ask no alms when ills betide.
Though of your journey's end I have no knowing,
Travel a little distance by my side.
Lonely am I; lonely; I have not spoken

INSURRECTION

Closely with friend this many a questing day;
Body, my beast of burden, stumbles broken,
Rowelled by desperate spur along the way.
Pilgrim, if lonely spirit cross another
And pride in me salute in you your pride,
Shall we not either recognise a brother?"

But reticence held me, and I passed him wide.

V

And sometimes met with those who offered me
Comfort upholstered like a harlot's bed
With winks for ribbons, shrugs to swansdown wed,
And squalor under frowsy frippery.

This draggletail of passion should be mine,
This slattern bastard born of spleen and lust,
Convention's shrewd Bacchante, if I must
Yield to the senses' feverish anodyne!

But I would turn, and, half-defeated, failing,
(How near defeat, they never guessed or knew,)
Load my last breath with scorn, and cry "You?
You?"

And cry, at bay before their vanguard, railing,

VI

"What! *you* had vision? mountains, comets, seas,
Wild storm, wild beauty, wild embattled flames,

COLLECTED POEMS

You harnessed to your tongues with hackneyed ease.
Tamers of splendour! those familiar names

Trouble you not, less kingly, more remote
Than gain and ease, your god, your man-made grail.
Not nature's giants, not cosmic menace smote
Your souls with awe, or thrust you down the scale.

No, nor the thoughts your thought could not embrace,
A God's intention, void, sublime, or strange,
The birth or death of time, the bourn of space,
Nor unimaginable colours' range,

Nor the continuous eastward roll of earth,
Half, in the energy of day aware;
Half, where the sweeping shadow curves its girth,
Within night's darkened temple cowed in prayer.

No deep misgivings, no mysterious faith;
Your very god was passed from hand to hand;
You had no inkling of the nobler breath
Blown on the spark you could not understand.

VII

"The little spark within the heart of man.
How should you know the desperate clutch of fingers
That feel the moment slipping, feel the dear
Infrequent moment slipping as it lingers,

INSURRECTION

The flaming hour ironic in its fleetness,
The rush of vision swift beyond belief?
Near, as the dead to the incredulous living;
So dead, the heart is rigid with its grief.

What would you offer me as compensation
After your sloth had blanketed my fire?
Your deepest peace, satiety Lethean;
Your aim, diversion; and your spur, desire.

Tragic, or merry, be the body's passion,
Ordained or gay; not, not the sordid mean!
Your soul's a skinny waif, that was not driven
To sin, but sought small solaces unclean.

You struck no fire from flint; you neither knew
Fasting nor feasting; vigour, nor a kiss;
The silk pavilioned bed of Aphrodite,
Or woodland hardihood of Artemis.

VIII

"Ashamed of tolerance, but more ashamed
Of hot intolerance; who hold the snare
Less perilous when fraudulently named;
Forgetting folly, while remembering care;

Who shun the sinner with averted eyes;
Mistrust the impulse, danger in its breath;
Who think truth wholly truth, lies wholly lies;
Who never lived, but duly wept at death;

COLLECTED POEMS

Who could not gaily stake the cherished whole
Upon the spinning coin's fantastic turn;
Who count the moneyed value of your soul,
And give, but, giving, claim the just return.

IX

"I'll dip contempt's broad ladle for a measure
Lest I accept reprieve in such a guise,
Such cheap attainment where I most despise,
Or lull disquiet by such sham of pleasure.

Love, amongst counterfeits and marsh-light gleams
Already arch-impostor, doubly aped
By lust, to parody (most rarely shaped),
The consummation of our difficult dreams!"

LOVE

EARLY LOVE

No eye shall see the poem that I write
For you; not even yours; but after long
Forgetful years have passed on our delight
Some hand may chance upon a dusty song
Of those fond days when every spoken word
Was sweet, and all the fleeting things unspoken
Yet sweeter, and the music half unheard
Murmured through forests as a charm unbroken.

Merely the plain and ordinary page
Of two who loved, sole-spirited and clear.
Will you, O stranger of another age,
Not grant a human and compassionate tear
To us, who each the other held so dear?
A single tear fraternal, sadly shed,
Since that which was so living, is so dead?

1913

BEFORE AND AFTER

BEFORE

I WAIT your coming as a miracle,
And the expectant morning waits with me;
Time hangs suspended as a quiet bell
That once did strike the hours successively,
For over all the country lies a spell,
A hush, a painted stillness, where I see
(As calm as skies reflected in a well)
The fields enchanted, waiting silently.

AFTER

Oh, heart! the beauty of your wind-swept hair
Blown from your temples as you swiftly came!
For all the pagan grace of you was there,
Remembered, ardent, after months the same.
The eager muscles of your throat were bare,
The candid passion lit you like a flame,
As, striving on against the countering air,
You reached me, failing, breathing out my name.

1919

FEAR

YOUR caravel was loosely moored,
—So lightly moored, so slightly moored,—
It ranged with every passing swell,
Your gipsy-hearted caravel
That only silken ropes secured.

I dreamt that you might slip away,
—Might slide away, might glide away,—
When I was absent, on a breeze
Enticing you to other seas
With whispers of a lovelier day.

The sirens underneath the stars,
—The flaunting stars, the haunting stars,—
Would cast adrift your mooring-rope
(Farewell, my heart! farewell, my hope!)
And stretch the sails upon your spars,

And you would sail before the wind,
—Elusive wind, delusive wind,—
Radiant upon your moonlit deck,
And not a moment would you reck
Of me whom you had left behind.

COLLECTED POEMS

You'd come to legendary coasts,
To nameless coasts, to tameless coasts,
And hear of unimagined things:
The exploits of vainglorious kings,
Their fabled pride, and braggart boasts;

Iris you'd meet, and Mercury,
Sweet Mercury, fleet Mercury;
You'd see the constellations change,
You'd pass the magnet mountain-range
That draws a ship to mystery;

You'd see, on black basaltic rocks,
On jagged rocks, on cragged rocks,
The lonely Polyphemus stand,
The scourge and terror of the land,
Amongst his decimated flocks.

You'd turn from thence; a rainbow arc,
A magic arc, a tragic arc,
That spanned the sky from east to west
Might lure you on a dreamer's quest
And close for ever on your barque.

Ah God! perhaps this very night,
This hated night, this fated night,
You heard the breeze, the sirens' spell. . . .
I faint, I look; your caravel
In harbour still lies gold and white.

IRRUPTION

WELL-GREAVED Achaians; lordliest Atreides;
Great-hearted friendship, foes no lesser-hearted;
Murmur of leaves on distant Latmos; coo
Of doves on Thisbe; pasture-land of horses,
Argos! and thou, the windy-beached Enispe;
Achaian fleet on that unvintaged sea,
Vessels of bronze and scarlet, beaked with gold,
In great procession Troy-wards, ranging wide
Over wide waters, bearing mighty captains,
Sons of the gods, the fosterlings of Zeus,
Casters of spear and javelin, fleet-footed
Or wise in council, flowing-haired Achaians,
—This was my epic and my company.

For you, Tintagel pinnacled on rocks
Emerged from desolate chords, until your mood
Wearied of saga; melted to the dusk
Falling on Spanish cities, when the shutters
Open again on evening, and the flute
Of some stray passing goat-herd down the street
Pipes idly, or the strident gay guitar
Befriends the lover's whisper at the window;
For you sat playing, and your fingers roamed
To Russia, where the simple is the blessed,
And woke both melancholy pomp and folly,

COLLECTED POEMS

And passed again to fantasy that is
Homeless, and shies away from thoughts of home.

I read; you played; we had no need of speech.

They came, noisy and shrill, well-meaning; they
Spoke to us first of wealth and then of love,
The love of others, negligently shrewd
And empty in their chatter. Then they spoke,
Wise and judicious, and we answered them,
Judicious likewise, flattering their mood.
But our eyes found each other, and we fell
Suddenly silent, caught in treachery,
Remembering that proud world wherein we lately
dwelt.

1919

DISSONANCE

CLAMOUR has riven us, clamour and din.
My hand reaches blindly out for your hand, but
 within
My mind cannot reach to your mind, because of the
 clamour and din.

Clang as of brass, an uproar that will not cease.
I would take from the strangest god or devil the
 gift of peace.
If the strife that divides us were suddenly stilled and
 would cease,

I could come to you, come under washed void skies,
My thought in your thought embraced, my eyes and
 your eyes
Levelly meeting without the quick faltering of
 disguise.

But all is a harshness and rack where in vain
We strive through the grossness of flesh to discover
 our souls again,
And the closer we clasp one another, the further
 apart remain.

1918

BITTERNESS

YES, they were kind exceedingly; most mild
Even in indignation, taking by the hand
One that obeyed them mutely, as a child
Submissive to a law he does not understand.

They would not blame the sins his passion wrought.
No, they were tolerant and Christian, saying, "We
Only deplore . . .", saying they only sought
To help him, strengthen him, to show him love; but
 he

Following them with unrecalcitrant tread,
Quiet, towards their town of kind captivities,
Having slain rebellion, ever turned his head
Over his shoulder, seeking still with his poor eyes

Her motionless figure on the road. The song
Rang still between them, vibrant bell to answering
 bell,
Full of young glory as a bugle; strong;
Still brave; now breaking like a sea-bird's cry, "Fare-
 well!"

And they, they whispered kindly to him, "Come!
Now we have rescued you. Let your heart heal.
 Forget!

BITTERNESS

She was your danger and your evil spirit." Dumb,
He listened, and they thought him acquiescent. Yet

(Knowing the while that they were very kind)
Remembrance clamoured in him: "She was wild and
free,

Magnificent in giving; she was blind
To gain or loss, and, loving, loved but me,—but me!

"Valiant she was, and comradely, and bold;
High-mettled; all her thoughts a challenge, like gay
ships
Adventurous, with treasure in the hold.
I met her with the lesson put into my lips,

"Spoke reason to her, and she bowed her head,
Having no argument, and giving up the strife.
She said I should be free. I think she said
That, for the asking, she would give me all her life."

And still they led him onwards, and he still
Looked back towards her standing there; and they,
content,
Cheered him and praised him that he did their will.
The gradual distance hid them, and she turned, and
went.

1921

*EXILE ENDED

WELL, I have railed, and wept, and curst, enough;
Love's absence now shall show the other side,
And with the calendar reverse the stuff
And ravelled stitches change to pattern's pride.
I'll think no more on thirty days rehearsed,
I'll think no more on thirty nights that crept,
Nor on the silks' confusion, all reversed,
Since I have railed enough, and curst, and wept.
My daily stitching speeds to full design;
My darkness to a streak of dawn hath paled;
Time's dragon-tongue devours another line,
And I have curst enough, and wept, and railed.
As on the moon, a month hath been a night,
But this new month of days shall bear the first
And roll the lunar peaks to solar light
Since I have railed enough, and wept, and curst.

1929

*THE LAST TRAIN DOWN

HE sat in his little room in the quiet lamplight,
The shadows crowding round its pool of gold;
His sleeping dogs through their hunter's dreams
 whined softly,
And the night without was glitter-bright and cold.

He worked in the comradeship of his books and
 papers,
But all the while with a secret deep content
That the ticking watch on the table brought her
 nearer,
Till the hour when he sprang to his feet and went,

Went out in the night and the snow beneath the
 starlight,
Big frosty stars that showed him the rutted lanes
And the meadows very still in the quilted whiteness,
Forgetful of running corn and hoyden rains,

When the ponds lay frozen polished among the
 willows,
So still, it seemed that they never more could dance,
Those meadows by breezes quickened, that dimpled
 water,
Held in the spell of the glittering black trance.

COLLECTED POEMS

He thought, he would bring her back through those
transfigured pastures,
Watching bright heaven above the bony trees,
Till they saw the light of his window in the valley
Yellow with warmth and the promise of soft ease.

He paced the quay of the little wayside station,
Under the bluish gas-jets' cheerless flare.
The train brought life, a shouting, and a banging.
Three chilly passengers got out. She was not there.

*NO OBLIGATION

COME on the wings of great desire,
Or stay away from me.
You're not more stable than the day,
Or than the day less free.

The dawning day has clouds in store;
Desire her cloudy moods;
And sunlit woods of morning may
By noon be darkened woods.

So be you free to come or stay
Without a reason given,
As free as clouds that blot the light
Across the face of heaven.

1932

* LOVE TOO PAINFUL

IF I had only loved your flesh
And careless damned your soul to Hell,
I might have laughed and loved afresh,
And loved as lightly and as well,
 With little more to tell.

But since to clasp your soul I strove,
(That mountebank, that fugitive,)
And poured the river of my love
Through meshes that like Danaë's sieve
 Drained all I had to give,

Now nightly by the tamarisks
I pace, and watch the risen moon
Litter the sea with silver disks,
And pray of night one only boon:
 Let my release be soon.

1920

* WARNING

Now in the spring of love and the spring of the year,
The country with plum and cherry is white as a
 bride;

The blue-tits among the blossom chatter that spring
 is here,

And in the air with the birds our hearts abide.

But in the latened summer what small dark fruits
 shall come,

Staining the bridal boughs with goutts of blood,

Dark as rubies among the cherry and plum,

Jewelled but threatened drops in place of snowy
 scud?

And love's revenges their fruits for us shall bear,

The darkened fruits of passion so fresh in spring
 begun,

When the very birds that sang are the foes of fruit,—
 beware,

My love! go, scare the birds with a prudent gun.

May 1931

* VALEDICTION

Do not forget, my dear, that once we loved.
Remember only, free of stain or smutch,
That passion once went naked and ungloved,
And that your skin was startled by my touch.

And though the processes of mortal change
Delude you now to different belief,
Consider only that the heart's a strange
Quick turn-coat, undeserving of your grief.

Forget,—regret,—should these two words be
 brothers?
If rhyme to rhyme be kith, so let them be!
Pass from my heart towards the heart of others;
But in your passing, half-remember me.

1932

* CYNICISM

THE master of an easy praise,
The mistress of an easy heart,
How close they are to us in phrase,
How far in feeling set apart!

Or so we think, and so we flatter
Ourselves that greater depths are ours;
But here's the gospel of the matter:
All passion drops like summer flowers.

1928

THREE SONNETS

I

SUCH new, unreasonable impatiences
Since I am lately fall'n in love, distract.
By myriads of noisy urgencies
My privacy is constantly attacked.
Estranged from all, and rapt, I only ask
To be alone when I am not with you;
I shun all voices, shrink from every task;
All else seems false; one only thing seems true.
Yet must the world come beating at my doors
To tear me from my ravishment away
And break the music of those corridors,
Those whispering galleries, wherein I stray,
That like a sea-cave or a fluted shell
Reverberate with love's whole ocean swell.

THREE SONNETS

II

Time was our banker once, and on our credit
Like an indulgent father let us draw.
Now he's turned sour, and our account does edit
And pounces on us with a usurer's claw.
We squandered once, where now we count th' ex-
pense;

He scores our ledger with accusing mark;
Our minted gold is turned to shabby pence,
And every clock is Time's detective clerk.
What shall we do then? Shall we meekly bear
This scrutiny, since Time's turned martinet?
Or ruthlessly our bankruptcy declare
And shamelessly dishonour every debt?

Were we indeed provoked to such a course,
Say, where would conscience be, and where
remorse?

COLLECTED POEMS

III

Between what different moods we alternate,
Caged, snarling beasts that our poor spirit tear:
Love, magnanimity, revenge, and hate,
Jealousy, and emasculate despair.
Hate is the tiger that with cruel paw
Clouts us until with blood we're blinded red,
And jealousy the lynx with poisoned claw
That sends the venom raging to our head.
Despair's the jackal that will each advise
With craven counsel in the weakest hour;
But love's the lion that with golden eyes
Shames the unruly pack and makes them cower.
Then, Lion, from your corner of the den,
Grant your majestic patronage to men!

1927

KING'S DAUGHTER
(1929)

KING'S DAUGHTER

I

If I might meet her in the lane,
Riding a raven horse
That trailed his golden halter loose
And snuffed the golden gorse;

If I might see her riding high
In her little golden coat,
Borne on his prancing as the waves
Carry a little boat;

If I might see her with her hand
Looping the scarlet rein,
If I might see her at the turn
Come riding down the lane,—

If I should spy her by the lake
Sweeping a shapely harp
To the blunt-nosed circle, golden-ringed,
Of old enchanted carp;

If I should see the ebon swan
With scarlet beak sail by,
And pause to catch the fragile notes
Dripped from her melody;

COLLECTED POEMS

If I should see the spindly crane
Stand sentinel in the reeds,
While morsels of her song float out
And drift like wind-blown seeds,—

Or should I see her cross the snow
With a grey wolf at her heels,
On the plain between the black, black firs
When the moon remotely steals

Up past the hamlet's gabled roofs
To hang above the church,
And turn her golden coat to ash,
And pale the ghostly birch;

And should I see her glide away
Into the fir-trees' night,
Then should I know that I had read
Her changeling soul aright.

KING'S DAUGHTER

II

Cygnets and barnacle geese
Follow her when she passes
Barefoot through daisied grasses.

Briars blown straying and loose
Catch at her as she goes
Down the path between woodbine and rose.

Seeking to follow or hold her,
The silly birds and the thorn.
But her laughter is merry with scorn.

What would she say if I told her
That the goose, and the swan,
And the thorn, and my spirit, were one?

COLLECTED POEMS

III

Goosey, goosey gander,
Whither would you wander?
Upstairs, downstairs,
And in my lady's chamber.

He shall see his lady
When she comes at night
Carrying her candle
And her roses white.

He shall see his lady
When she sets her flowers
Down before the mirror
In the secret hours;

When she sets her candle
And the mirror gleams,
And she before her looking-glass
Slips her shift, and dreams.

Whiter than the candle-wax,
Whiter than the rose,
Is her young and lovely throat,
As goosey gander knows.

He shall watch her gravely,
Perched upon a chair;

KING'S DAUGHTER

He shall see her lift her arms
And loose her golden hair;

He shall see her cross her room,
All gold, and white as milk,
With little naked goose-girl feet
And shift of clinging silk.

Goosey, goosey gander,
Will you be my spy?
Let into your lady's room
No one dare to pry.

COLLECTED POEMS

IV

When swans come to the steps
She gives them bread;
But with the dusk they fly
Free, overhead.

When love comes to her heart
She greets her lover;
But love at dusk takes wing,
And passes over.

She lets her heart go free
With the wild swans,
Towards the western sky's
Foundry of bronze.

KING'S DAUGHTER

V

How shall I haunt her separate sleep,
That in the glades of night
Her dreams may keep a tryst with mine,
And be not parted quite?

Tales will I tell her for her dreams
In those nocturnal glades,
Wherein processional shall pass
The dim and lovely shades;

Where some shall pass in rose-red silks,
And some shall pass in rags,
And some shall ride in scarlet cloaks
Beneath the windy flags.

And one shall be a flute-player,
And she shall hear his note
Fading among the blue valleys,
Vagabond, remote.

And one a rider dark in mail,
With steel-tipped lance held high,
Shall pass along a lonely road
Upon his way to die.

The stars like taper-points shall shine
Within his helm and greaves;

COLLECTED POEMS

The pacing footfall of his horse
Shall bruise on drifted leaves.

And one shall pause beside her couch,
And bend and whisper low
Some music of a foreign tongue,
But what, she shall not know;

Only, some echo of his speech,
Melodious on the air,
Shall tremble still against her heart,
My secret messenger.

KING'S DAUGHTER

VI

She brought with careless hand
Meadowsweet, cherry,
Orchis and berry,
Agrimony, broom,
And left them in my room
As a token planned.

So that the room was rich
With her memorials,
A store of festivals
For my undoing,
And this bestrewing
Did helpless me bewitch.

She should have brought
Enchanter's Nightshade,
A mandrake's root,
And out of Egypt fruit,
And thus have made
Me turn to naught;
But with such innocent
And wayside blooms
Should not have wrought
Such havoc in my rooms
Or in my heart.
No, I protest
She should have used her utmost art
And cantrip best.

COLLECTED POEMS

No less did I deserve
Who scornful am, and proud,
If she would have me serve
In love avowed.
She should not tangle me
In simple wreaths,
Nor with such garlands strangle me
To happy deaths.
She cheated in the game,
Sweet rogue, that day she came
And snared me unawares.
Now shall I tell her name and shame,
Or shall I yield me pliant to her snares?

April 1929

KING'S DAUGHTER

VII

She passed, with the wind in her hair
And the sun in her eyes.
But my heart was unaware
Of its own surprise.

She passed among blossoming trees,
With her milking pail;
Peach, judas, anemones,
Up the riven vale.

Flushed blossom as sunset snow,
And the delicate sky;
But I stood and watched her go,—
What a fool was I!

COLLECTED POEMS

VIII

Which were the strings, musician,
That showed thee Paradise?
Which was the coast, O mariner,
That filled thy sails with spice?
Which were the stars, O shepherd,
That strewed thy lonely skies?

Her spirit is the violin
Whereon my hands in secret play;
The breezes off a low Cathay
Have scooped my sails to scented caves,
And danced my barque upon the waves,
And chased me on a gale of musk;
A constellation all unknown
Has slung its coins upon the dusk,
And stabbed its sign for me alone.

Keep thy straight strings, musician!
And, shepherd, watch thy stars.
She's more to me than Jupiter,
Or Mercury and Mars.
Make landfall, master-mariner,
Where anchors hook in gold;
Mine is the earliest melody,
The haven, and the fold.

January 1929

KING'S DAUGHTER

IX

The greater cats with golden eyes
Stare out between the bars.
Deserts are there, and different skies,
And night with different stars.
They prowl the aromatic hill,
And mate as fiercely as they kill,
And hold the freedom of their will
To roam, to live, to drink their fill;
But this beyond their wit know I:
Man loves a little, and for long shall die

Their kind across the desert range
Where tulips spring from stones,
Not knowing they will suffer change
Or vultures pick their bones.
Their strength's eternal in their sight,
They rule the terror of the night,
They overtake the deer in flight,
And in their arrogance they smite;
But I am sage, if they are strong:
Man's love is transient as his death is long.

Yet oh what powers to deceive!
My wit is turned to faith,
And at this moment I believe
In love, and scout at death.
I came from nowhere, and shall be

COLLECTED POEMS

Strong, steadfast, swift, eternally:
I am a lion, a stone, a tree,
And as the Polar star in me
Is fixed my constant heart on thee.
Ah, may I stay forever blind
With lions, tigers, leopards, and their kind.

KING'S DAUGHTER

X

Stave off the moment when the meddling tick
Of clock will make her say, "I must be gone".
Such four-and-twenty hours' arithmetic
Is but of bliss a wanton jettison.

How can she better be employed than here
In dalliance with one who finds her fair?
What business calls her, that she's so severe
And sets her errands over my despair?

What does she hope to meet, if go she will?
A swan with cygnets walking down a lane?
Two fighting hedgehogs, fierce with prickly quill?
An adder waking to the sun again?

Fine sights! a charm of finches in a brawl;
A string of elvers hurrying from the sea;
A pride of peacocks preening on a wall,—
But not so fine as she might see with me.

Why haste, Princess? for all your grand pretence
You've nothing better in the world to do;
So stay with one who'd change for paltry pence
This hour against the riches of Peru.

March 1929

COLLECTED POEMS

XI

Put on your smock, Princess; let satins lie.
Put all your plumes and all your velvets by;
Pull on your gauntlets and your country sandals,
And leave the city to its summer scandals.

Princess, you played at fashion long enough;
Your lover sickens of this Blindman's-buff.
Come, drop your fan, and if you need a screen
Seek it behind a branch of myrtle green;

I'll swear,—and you may take my oath for certain,—
You have no need to peep behind a curtain,
For in my eyes you'll far more lovely be
If you'll but dodge me round a forest tree.

March 1929

KING'S DAUGHTER

XII

Sagitta, lean your ear between the leaves,
There comes a murmur down the glade.
It is the hunting-horn, it is the bee
That from the foxglove thieves;
It is the echo of the caves,
The populous temple of the tree;
It is love's very danger and its sound;
Sagitta, stay your flight aslant the shade!

All's green within this wood; the very light
That falls through leaves on moss, is green;
The dark-green yew-tree splits the lichened rocks;
The silver birches, slight
As naked fountains, leap in air;
The climbing hewel's emerald mocks
The emerald drugget of the dappled ground;
No greener under sea, than this ravine.

Sagitta, cool and fair, be not deceived.
Careless Sagitta, as a mermaid fair.
This leafy innocence is full of threats;
Lost hearts are ill-retrieved!
There's menace to your lightfoot grace,
Your muslin sprigged with violets.
Braid, braid your pearls between your fingers, lass:
Muslin and mischief make a pretty pair.

March 1929

COLLECTED POEMS

XIII

Onyx is counted black, and marble white;
Peaches that ripening hang on sunny wall
Are counted soft and downy to their fall.

So may they be, yet I will not compare
Her heart to onyx, throat to marble fair;
Nor say, "Beside her skin are peaches rough".
She is herself, and that shall be enough.

Although the blackness of her heart torment
Me, and her whiteness make me turbulent,
I'll draw no proverb from another sphere:
She has no strict comparisons to fear.

If she's black-hearted, that's her single choice;
If she's white-skinned, that's Nature's proper voice;
If in my arms she soft as peaches lie,
Why then, I'll simply say, "How happy I!"

March 1929

KING'S DAUGHTER

XIV

Run back, run back, false clock, and tell the time
Over again; indulge my straitened heart,
And let the minutes tick as ticks my rhyme,
A twin device to parcel life and art.

The men of science tell that Time's a scroll
Already all unwound, no Now or Then.
So will not science for my needy soul
Perform its tricks, and give me time again?

Only some hours I ask, a shabby dole
Out of the future and the past of men.
Quack-master Time, your scenery re-roll!
You're rich, I'm poor; let's balance clock and pen.

See, I am bound to rhyme as you to hours;
We strike our chime as comes the measured place,
But I live once, since me your sleight devours,
And you sprawl free of almanac and space.

Play fair, impostor; me your fraud confines.
A poet's but a drudge, that must compress
Life's great allowance to a strip of lines,
Love's complication to a word's caress.

Give me Ravenna's noon among the pines,
Give me again the ruffle and the stress;
Verona's double midnight, and the signs
Of youth regardless of its own excess.

COLLECTED POEMS

A few especial hours to me restore!
Out of your backwards-forwards wealth concede
Those hours when I forgot your niggard store,
And thought my love commensurate with your
greed.

ENVOI

THE catkin from the hazel swung
When you and I and March were young.

The flute-notes dripped from liquid May
Through silver night and golden day.

The harvest moon rose round and red
When habit came and wonder fled.

October rusted into gold
When you and I and love grew old.

Snow lay on hedgerows of December
Then, when we could no more remember.

But the green flush was on the larch
When other loves we found in March.

*

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